

Distracted Driving

Teens and Distracted Driving:

If you have a teenager in your household, you are already aware of the burgeoning phenomenon of texting. However, those of us who still prefer other means of communication may not be aware of how often teens text. By the time teens reach driving age, texting is their number one activity. The average teen sends 100 texts a day, which is one text every ten minutes.[1] While this clearly limits their ability to interact on a personal level with those around them, there is an even more dangerous problem-teens are texting while they are driving.[2]

Texting is the ultimate distraction for young drivers. Recent studies have shown that texting while driving causes lapses in attention far more detrimental to safe driving than talking on a cell phone and 6 times worse than driving while intoxicated.[3] The mathematics of texting should make not only parents, but every driver of the road, concerned about their safety.

In the five seconds it takes to physically type out a text, the teen driver is not looking at the road or traffic patterns or traffic control signals.[4] She/He is looking at the small keyboard and screen in their lap, often using both hands to type. During that five second lapse in attention, a car moving even thirty miles per hour will have travelled more than two hundred feet. At fifty-five miles per hour, the car will have travelled more than the length of a football **field, its driver obvious to the surroundings**. When the teen finally looks up it will still take five seconds/300 feet to brake and bring the car to a stop.[5]

Unfortunately, the result of this deadly and irresponsible behavior is death and or injury. The number of deaths caused by teen's texting while driving is truly staggering. In 2009, texting while driving caused the death of eleven teens every day that year. Teen texting also caused Three Hundred and Thirty Thousand (330,000) injuries. In fact, teen texting causes twenty five (25%) of all automobile crashes. [6]

The Solution

Just Talking to teens is only one step in the right direction. We should certainly educate our children about the dangers of texting and driving and driving with someone who texts and drives as we do about drugged and drunk driving. However, there are some other solutions that should be seriously considered by parents, state and local governments, and technology manufactures. The most obvious solution is to make it illegal to text and drive. In a recent survey of young people, more than 80% stated that the best way to change their behavior is to enact tougher penalties for those caught texting and driving coupled with more vigorous police enforcement of those laws.[7] Given those attitudes it is surprising how lax the texting restrictions are across the country. Only forty states have anti texting laws on the books, and in many states, the penalties are so low, i.e. \$20.00 for the first offense, that they are useless as a behavior modification.[8] Also, making it a primary law demonstrates we take the problem seriously.

A spokesman for the Governors Highway Safety Association stated "Tough laws that are visibly and aggressively enforced are the most effective deterrent to texting and driving by teens. Parents also need to play a key role and must be the first line of defense. Regardless of the law, a parent needs to forbid the teen from texting and driving and follow up on any offenses with punishment including taking away the keys."[9]

And that is where new technology can play a crucial role. There are already apps for smart phones that will shut off the keyboard while the GPS shows the phone moving above a preset speed. While a good start, this requires the parent to download and install and manage the app. What parents need now is a phone with a built in system that allows the account holder, the parent, to quickly and easily turn off texting privileges.[10] Hopefully, the cell phone manufactures will funnel research dollars into this area in the near future.

We make our children wear helmets while biking, and we don't hand them a beer as they get in the car, why would we give them a cell phone?

Why aren't we doing more to protect everyone from the texting teen? Let's save lives!

[1] "Teens Smart Phones & Texting", by Amanda Lenhart for the Pew Research Center. March 19, 2012.

[2] Minnesota Public Radio, The Daily Circuit, October 25, 2012. Almost every young adult is texting while driving."

[3] Minnesota Public Radio, The Daily Circuit, October 25, 2012 Drunk driving increases your crash risk by 400%, but texting while driving increases your crash risk by 2300%. NHTSB Study of 2012.

[4] Texting requires visual manual and cognitive attention from the driver." Distracted Driving-Facts and Stats. "See [www.distracted.gov/content](http://www.distracted.gov/content/get-the-facts) /get-the-facts.

[5] "Blueprint for Ending Distracted Driving", National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, VTTI.

[6] Its Time for A Parental Control, No Texting While Driving Phone", by Tod Wilms for Forbes/SAP. September 15, 2012.

[7] "Police Crackdown Can Curb Texting While Driving." By Larry Copeland, for USA Today, August 23, 2012. See also State Farm Survey 2012.

[8] "Police Crackdown Can Curb Texting While Driving." By Larry Copeland, for USA Today, August 23, 2012. See also State Farm Survey 2012.

[9] "Police Crackdown Can Curb Texting While Driving." By Larry Copeland, for USA Today, August 23, 2012. See also State Farm Survey 2012.

[10] Its Time for A Parental Control, No Texting While Driving Phone", by Tod Wilms for Forbes/SAP. September 15, 2012.