

"Distracted Driving Awareness" highlights importance of all travelers staying alert

ODOT News

Safety advocates hope awareness of distractions will reduce roadway incidents

April 2, 2013

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[Radio version](#)

SALEM - Getting distracted while you're driving can be catastrophic: from 2009 - 2011 in Oregon, 41 people died in distracted driving crashes. Even if you were buckled up properly, obeying the speed limit and driving sober, a split-second distraction could cost a life.

"Distracted driving is a behavior that's dangerous to drivers, passengers, and even people walking or biking," said Troy E. Costales, Oregon Department of [Transportation Safety Division](#) administrator, who noted that in addition to the distracted driving deaths, from 2009 – 2011, there were five pedestrians or bicyclists who were killed in crashes while *they* were distracted. "When drivers divert their attention from the task of to focus on some other activity, they've just increased their chances of getting in a crash. And the same is true for bicyclists and pedestrians who are distracted. It's worth our time to pay attention when we're out using the transportation system."

Across the U.S., one of every ten fatalities on the nation's roadways can be attributed to a distracted driver. While most any activity can distract a driver, one of the more common behaviors is using a cell phone. It's illegal to use a handheld mobile communications device while driving in Oregon, for almost everyone, but people still do, and it's dangerous. According to the U.S. Department of Transportation, sending or receiving a text takes a driver's eyes from the road for an average of 4.6 seconds. Traveling 55 mph, 4.6 seconds of texting is like driving the length of a football field full of people while blindfolded.

A dangerous distraction, though, can occur anytime a driver voluntarily diverts attention to something not related to driving that uses the drivers' eyes, ears or hands. For bicyclists, it means not watching or listening for potential interference from vehicles, trains or other traffic. For pedestrians, having earphones in or being [distracted by texting](#) can result in making a dangerous choice, such as crossing a busy street at a location other than a crosswalk. All of these situations have one thing in common: not paying attention to the task at hand.

According to the Governor's Highway Safety Association, there are four types of driver distraction, and any of them can be deadly:

- Visual: when you look at something other than the road
- Auditory: when you are listening to something not connected with the road or the traffic
- Manual: when your hands are not on the wheel (or handlebars)
- Cognitive: when you are thinking about something other than the driving task at hand

Examples of distracted driving include using a cell phone, eating, grooming, or reading. Before engaging in a distracting behavior - whether you are behind the wheel, on a bike or walking in a high traffic area - consider the potential consequences, and then get to a safe place before you take any action that takes you away from being focused.

Here are a few other tips to avoid distracted driving, from the AAA Foundation and ODOT:

1. **Plan ahead.** Check TripCheck.com or call 511 before you head out. Look at your route and plan your options for stopping.
2. **Stow electronic devices.** You can retrieve them when you pull over.
3. **Buckle up.** Make sure your passengers and pets are properly secured.
4. **Eat and be hydrated.** Get a meal in before you get behind the wheel so you won't be tempted to root around for food or drink while driving.
5. **Stow loose objects.** The fewer things that can roll around and distract you, the better.

6. Bicyclists and pedestrians: keep your eyes and ears open to traffic.

Most importantly, "get your brain in the game." Scan the road, use your mirrors often and stay alert. To learn more about the impacts of distracted driving and what you can do to prevent it, visit www.distraction.gov.

Important extras

- Oregon's cell phone law that went into effect Jan. 1, 2012 banned all texting while driving. It also removed most exemptions for using handheld devices so that nearly everyone is prohibited from using a handheld mobile communications device while driving.
- Convictions for illegally using a mobile communications device:

Year #
2008 40
2009 14
2010 9,848
2011 16,643
2012 22,892

- Fatalities in recent years in crashes involving a distracted driver: 2011 - 15; 2010 - 14; 2009 - 12. Officials believe cell phone usage and other distractions contributing to crashes are under-reported, so these numbers could be higher in reality. See attached [report](#) for breakdown by county.
- More tips from AAA Foundation for preventing distracted driving:

GET YOUR VEHICLE ROAD-READY. Adjust seat positions, climate controls, sound systems and other devices before you leave. Clean your headlights and make sure your windshield wipers work.
DRESS FOR SUCCESS – BEFORE YOU GET IN THE CAR. Your car isn't a dressing room. Brush your hair, shave, put on make-up, and tie your necktie before you leave. Keep extra, warm clothes in the trunk.
USE NEW TECHNOLOGY TO MAKE YOU A BETTER DRIVER. If your vehicle has special safety equipment and other technology that can improve your driving, use it – just make sure it's all programmed and ready to go BEFORE you leave.