



DISTRACTED DRIVING



DRIVING REQUIRES CONCENTRATION

Driving requires skill and concentration. Today, with hectic schedules, it seems we are constantly faced with distractions. These distractions can momentarily prevent us from performing basic and sometimes critical driving skills. Distractions affect all drivers from time to time. Most distractions are brief and without serious consequences; however, a distraction at the wrong time can have fatal results.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reports that an estimated 6,394,000 collisions were reported to police in the year 2000, involving an estimated 2,088,492 drivers. These resulted in about 2,063,000 injuries and 25,492 deaths.

Inattentive or distracted drivers appear to be a growing contributing factor in these collisions. What causes drivers to become inattentive or distracted while driving?

COMMON DISTRACTIONS

There are many things drivers do that may seem harmless, but could result in collisions:

- Reading maps or newspapers
- Personal grooming such as shaving, applying lipstick or mascara, combing or brushing hair
- Eating or drinking beverages
- Changing clothing
- Looking for lost or fallen items
- Flying insects
- Talking on cellular telephones
- Checking pagers
- Tuning the radio, tape or CD players
- Conversing with adult passengers
- Tending to small children and infants
- Smoking

Besides the obvious physical distractions, it is important to guard against mental and emotional distractions as well. Strong emotions can allow a driver to become distracted or inattentive. Strong emotions such as anger or grief may cause may cause a driver to become more aggressive and less tolerant of other drivers.

Stress may cause a driver to become preoccupied and unable to focus on driving. Distracted drivers may be less aware of their environment and perception of hazards such as red traffic lights.

Examples of emotional distractions may include someone approaching a red light, stopping for a moment and then driving through it. Perhaps that person did not

intend to ignore the red light but was simply distracted. This may also be the case when a driver stops at a green light because he/she is not paying attention.

CELLULAR TELEPHONES

The use of cellular telephones while driving is a growing concern. Studies show that drivers may be four times more likely to be involved in a collision while using a cellular phone.

Listed below are a few safety tips regarding the use of cellular phones:

- Avoid using cellular phones when driving.
- Use hands free microphones.
- Have a passenger dial or answer the phone for you.
- Keep your calls brief.
- If you expect a call to last more than a few seconds, pull over and stop to finish your call.
- Pull over before placing a call.
- Never take notes while driving.
- Make sure your cellular phone is easy to see and accessible to use only in emergencies.
- When in heavy traffic, tell the person you will call back when it is safer.

AVOIDING DISTRACTIONS

- Stay focused on your driving.
- Practice short, quick glances and avoid prolonged staring.
- Never read while driving, pull off the road to read.
- Do not attempt to take off coats or change clothes while driving.
- Conduct personal grooming before or after arriving at your destination.
- If you must take your eyes off the road momentarily, slow down, increase your following distance, check mirrors and identify any hazards around you.
- Do not allow passengers to divert your concentration.
- Make sure children are properly restrained before you begin driving.
- Pull over and stop if infants or small children require attention that would divert concentration from the road.
- Avoid eating or drinking beverages while driving.
- Make sure pets do not interfere with your vision or control of the car.



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