

FEWER PEOPLE TRAVELING WHILE DISTRACTED



DID YOU KNOW....

Distracted driving has become the number one killer of teenagers in America

MEASURES

Number of collisions attributed to inattention or distraction annually	961 (2010)
Percentage of distracted-driver involved collisions resulting in fatalities	22.3 percent (2006-2010)

Target Zero, the State of Washington's plan to eliminate fatalities and serious injuries defines distracted driving as any activity that diverts a driver's attention from the primary task of driving. Distractions may include using cell phones, eating, grooming, texting while driving, or adjusting the radio. Anything that diverts attention visually, manually, or mentally. Distractions that take a driver's eyes off the road are visual distractions. Manual distractions take a driver's hands off the steering wheel. Those that take a driver's mind off the road are cognitive distractions. Some non-driving activities, such as texting, are particularly dangerous because they involve all three types of distractions. (Target Zero)

Distraction or inattention is the second leading contributing cause of collisions in Seattle. More than 1,000 collisions are caused by inattention every year – 1,000 completely preventable collisions. Between 2006 and 2010, distraction accounted for more than 22 percent of traffic fatalities.

It is important to note that distraction-related collisions are underreported. If no one witnesses the distraction, it is up to the drivers to self-report being inattentive behind the wheel. Drivers are reluctant to do this since they would be admitting fault in the incident. Therefore, the actual number of collisions caused by distraction is likely much higher than is currently represented in collision data.

No matter what causes the distraction, we all have the responsibility to stay focused on the road. We should be ready for anything at any time on our roadways, especially in the bustling urban environment of Seattle. A child may run out between vehicles at any time, a driver may make an unexpected maneuver, or roadway conditions may change in a flash, so being alert is vital to safe travel.

Despite the fact that the use of handheld mobile

devices while driving is a primary offense in Washington, it is clear that people have not gotten the message. This is particularly worrisome since a driver who is texting while driving is as impaired as a driver with a .08 BAC (Washington State Department of Licensing). Talking on a cell phone – with or without a hands-free device – increases the chance of crashing by a factor of four (Text, Talk, Ticket – Washington Traffic Safety Commission).

Young drivers are particularly at risk. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention recently conducted a nationwide survey and found that nearly 60 percent of teens have texted or sent emails while driving. Data reflects the severity of this issue, as distracted driving has become the number one killer of teenagers in America.

Though nine out of 10 people support stricter laws (Blueprint for Ending Distracted Driving, NHTSA), cell phone use while driving remains a significant issue. As a city, we need to acknowledge the great responsibility we have as drivers and act accordingly. Parents need to set an example for kids by ignoring distractions and focusing on driving. Young people need to hold their peers accountable for their actions.

Even walking distracted can be a hazard. Everyone is a pedestrian at some point each day and it's easy to get engrossed in a phone conversation or music while walking. As pedestrians, we should never assume that we are safe just because we are crossing the street in a marked crosswalk. In fact, most pedestrian-involved collisions occur in marked crosswalks so it is crucial to pay attention when crossing any street.

People riding bikes should also avoid distractions. Some of the same distractions to other people on the road – music, mobile devices, for example – can be distracting to people on bikes. When riding in traffic or on trails, it's important to focus on your path.

ACTIONS

State data indicates that 40 percent of inattention-related deaths occurred during weekends with 25 percent occurring in July and August.

The United States Department of Transportation and NHTSA released the “Blueprint for Ending Distracted Driving” in June 2012 which recognizes stricter laws, increased enforcement, and more education for young drivers as effective measures to combat distracted driving. This Action Plan is in alignment with the federal recommendations. We will increase enforcement of distraction-related laws, raise awareness of the stricter cell phone laws, and support the importance of paying attention to the road through educational outreach.

EDUCATION

Conduct Direct Outreach to Young People

The City and our partners will engage young people through our schools in an effort to provide more education about the dangers of distracted driving. This program will include a contest that will challenge our city’s youth to take driving seriously.

Expand Citywide Outreach

While data shows that young drivers are most likely to be distracted while behind the wheel, people of all ages are prone to distracted driving. Citywide outreach will highlight our existing cell phone laws and remind people why it is so important to be attentive while traveling.

Coordinate the Driven to Distraction Pilot Project

The City has teamed up with Driven to Distraction, a statewide group of citizens concerned about the growing rate of distracted driving on the roads, to implement a low-cost pilot project in Seattle. This project will enlist the support of residents and businesses to distribute signs and safety messages

about distracted driving. Residents will work with local media to raise awareness about this issue and highlight trouble spots in the community. Before and after studies will be conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of this resident-to-resident plea to pay attention on our streets.

ENVIRONMENT

Improve Signage to Make it Easier to Find Your Way

Signage is an important factor in roadway safety. Poor signage can lead to distraction-related problems as drivers struggle to find their destination. To improve safety, SDOT is in the process of replacing all of our street name signs. Efforts are also underway to improve signage to port facilities, interstate highways, and major arterial routes.

Use Dynamic Message Signs to Support Enforcement

Special enforcement messages will be posted on the City’s network of Dynamic Message Signs while increased enforcement efforts are underway. The signs have the ability to reach hundreds of thousands of drivers per day and discourage distracted driving.

ENFORCEMENT

Conduct Distracted Driving Emphasis Patrols

NHTSA-funded studies in two U.S. locations showed a 38 to 56 percent reduction in cell phone use and a 42 to 68 percent reduction in texting while driving as a result of high visibility enforcement. The City and our partners at Public Health – Seattle & King County will collaborate to support increased enforcement of distracted driving laws. These efforts will be supported with publicity through media channels and will be focused in locations where distracted driving collisions occur most often.

