

# Driving Distractions

## Toolbox Talk



Driving distractions can be visual, cognitive, manual, or a combination of all these. Text messaging, for example, demands all three types of attention from a driver. A distraction's danger increases not only with the type or degree of attention it demands, but also with the frequency that a driver is exposed to it. All distractions have the same effect: they pull a driver's attention away from the road, endangering drivers, passengers, and bystanders.

Among the highest-risk driving distractions are:

- using an electronic device to text or talk;
- drowsiness;
- eating and drinking;
- grooming;
- reaching for a moving object;
- an insect in your vehicle;
- looking at an object outside your vehicle;
- adjusting a radio or music player;
- interacting with children, pets, and other passengers; and
- reading.

### How Drivers Can Avoid Distractions

- Turn off your cell phone or other mobile devices until you reach your destination.
- Hands-free does not mean risk-free. The cognitive distraction that occurs when talking on the phone is very dangerous and will cause you to miss important things going on around you, such as traffic signals, approaching traffic, and pedestrians.
- If you cannot wait to make or take a call or to text, pull over in a safe and legal place. As of September 1, 2017, it is illegal in Texas to text and drive, except in certain circumstances.

- Talking with passengers is also a cognitive distraction, but passengers can help alert you to dangers outside the vehicle. Do not engage in stressful or emotional conversations with passengers.
- Suspend all conversations when approaching locations with heavy vehicle or pedestrian traffic or road construction or when driving in severe weather conditions.
- Avoid smoking, eating, or drinking while driving.
- Pull off the road in a safe place to deal with insects, unruly passengers, children, or pets.
- Don't read, write or watch video screens while driving.
- Try to stay calm when in stressful driving situations. Do not respond to another driver's erratic driving by driving aggressively.

### Before You Begin Your Trip

- Get enough sleep – fatigue can reduce your attention level and reaction time.
- Avoid taking medication that causes drowsiness, either before the trip or while driving.
- Pre-program radio stations and set up your portable music player.
- Clear your vehicle of unnecessary objects.
- Familiarize yourself with all vehicle safety and electronics features.
- Plan your travel route: review maps or program your phone's map app.
- Adjust all mirrors for best all-around visibility.
- Fasten your seat belt and make sure passengers are wearing theirs. Ensure that children are in an approved child passenger restraint system or are wearing seat belts.

### How to Identify and Avoid Distracted Drivers

- Beware of drivers who are drifting over the center line or out of their lanes.
- Distracted drivers often drive at inconsistent speeds.
- Watch out for other drivers who seem to be preoccupied by using a cell phone, reading, eating, talking with passengers, or other distracted behaviors.
- Never try to pass a driver who doesn't seem aware of surrounding vehicles.
- Give a distracted driver plenty of room.

