

MOTOR VEHICLE FLEET Management Bulletin

FROM THE [LOSS CONTROL ORGANIZATION OF THE HARTFORD](#)

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Driver Distractions



The issue of driver distractions is an increasing fleet safety issue. According to the [National Highway Traffic Safety Administration](#) driver distraction is a factor in 80% of crashes. The significant increase in cellular phone use has served as the catalyst for the growing interest and overall problem of driver distractions.

What is driver distraction and how can it be defined? Driver distraction is not just talking on a cell phone when driving. Driver distraction is a form of inattention in which a driver is delayed in the identification or recognition of information needed to properly and safely accomplish the task of driving because some activity, event, object or person within or outside of the vehicle compels the driver to shift their attention away from the driving task. One NHTSA report roughly estimates that drivers engage in potentially distracting secondary tasks approximately 30% of the time their vehicles are in motion. Conversation with passengers is the most frequent secondary task. Other distractions include:

- Talking or texting on a cell phone
- Eating and reading
- Manipulating controls
- Navigation and hand held computers or devices
- Smoking
- Route Problems - looking for route and/or traffic signs
- Unfamiliar situations such as staring at an automobile crash

As a fleet manager or supervisor, what are you doing to reduce this exposure? Employers, under the theory of "respondeat superior" may be held legally liable for their employees' actions while in the course of their employment. Indeed employers can be held liable for an employee who is involved in a vehicle collision while conducting business on a cell phone. The question becomes - do you have policies and procedures in place that address distractions and especially the use of electronic devices including cell phones while an employee is operating a vehicle?



Some employers including the National Safety Council have instituted policies banning the use of cell phones while behind the wheel. This is not to suggest that this is the absolute answer but have you at least provided written guidelines as to a company policy? Some components of a policy may include:

- Keeping both hands on the steering wheel and staying alert to changing traffic conditions and to minimize the use electronic devices while driving.
- Limit the frequency and duration of usage of electronic devices while driving.
- Avoid the use of electronic devices if road conditions deteriorate including inclement weather, highway construction and road-side accidents.
- Avoid the use of electronic devices in situations with significant pedestrian and/or vehicular traffic.
- Avoid the use of cell phones when driving in unfamiliar areas.
- Don't take notes while driving.
- Avoid dialing the phone or texting while driving.
- Avoid answering incoming calls – allow calls to go into your voice mail.
- Avoid becoming too immersed in conversations and do not engage in frustrating or stressful conversations. You should safely park the vehicle in such situations.

Consider writing and adopting a policy that meets your business needs. The goal is the health and safety of your employees while operating a vehicle and not to endanger other motorists and pedestrians. Test and monitor the policy to determine if it is working. Disciplinary action should be considered for employees who fail to adhere to the policy.

Resources

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