

Transportation Safety Newsletter

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Preventing Distracted Driving

These days the number of distractions that drivers are exposed to are endless and can include things like talking or texting on cell phones, CB radios, radios, eating, daydreaming, other drivers and so much more.

Distracted driving can cause slowed perception of certain traffic events, which in turn leads to a delayed reaction. Slow reaction times can lead to poor driver input, such as incorrect steering inputs, too much brake pressure or even inaccurate accelerator pressure.

To protect employees and reduce the risk associated with a carrier's organization, commercial motor vehicle drivers should avoid distracted driving at all costs.

What are the three types of driving distractions?

To prevent distracted driving, let's first explain the different types so we can be better prepared to look out for them.

According to the CDC, there are three main types of distraction:

- **Visual:** taking your eyes off the road
- **Manual:** taking your hands off the wheel
- **Cognitive:** taking your mind off driving

A **manual distraction** is one that causes you to either take your hands off the wheel or take your eyes off the road.

There are several things that can divert your attention including handling the radio, eating, using your phone for texting, talking, taking pictures or even searching the internet. The most common physical distraction is any type of handheld device, whether it be a cell phone or an Electronic Logging Device (ELD).

A **mental or cognitive distraction** is anything that takes your mind off the road.

This could include having a conversation with a passenger, stress, anxiety or even daydreaming. When a driver is daydreaming or is under a lot of stress their mind could be wandering and is not focused on the most important thing, driving.

In many cases, a driver could even be mentally distracted due to a personal event that is causing anger or frustration. With their mind focused on their anger, they are lacking focus on the road and the many things that could be happening in and around their vehicle.



Marsh McLennan Agency Risk Control Contacts

RiskControlNW@MarshMMA.com

Doug Colley | (509) 789-7449
Bruce Hollcroft | (509) 363-4017
Brodie Loushin | (406) 533-1038
Pat McCarthy | (406) 327-6519
Shawn McDevitt | (406) 533-1016
Randy Mcleod | (509) 907-7268
Brendan Riley | (406) 457-2114
Rob Wynegar | (406) 268-2591

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A **visual distraction** is anything that causes the driver to remove their eyes from the road, which could include texting or looking at things along the road as they drive, like billboards or animals. It is important to always keep your eyes on the road and restrict glances away from the road to one second or less.

So, how can carriers limit distracted driving?

Take a look at your company's distracted driving or driver hands-free policy

The first step is to look over and update your company's hand-free policy.

When taking/placing a hands-free call while driving:

- Become familiar with hands-free technology available prior to getting behind the wheel
- Always consider driving conditions prior to taking/placing a phone call
- Use voice activated caller ID – not all calls need to be answered
- When appropriate, ask passengers to take/place calls for you
- Never take notes or attempt to look up a phone number or directions while driving
- Inform the person you're speaking with that you are driving, and that you may need to abruptly end the conversation
- Avoid making highly emotional or stressful calls
- If a call warrants your full attention, pull into a safe location and park
- Keep phone calls brief

Though federal, state and local laws permit hands free talking on a cell phone, a company policy should recommend employees limit their talk time for every conversation, and only accept calls that require immediate attention.

If a call is going to take time or require your full attention, terminate the call and resume when your vehicle is safely put in park.

Proactive driver training lowers distracted driving and insurance risk

The second step is regular driver training.

Underwriters look at many different risk factors and data provided to establish the potential risk levels and determine your insurance score, one of the primary factors in determining how much monthly insurance premium the consumer will incur.

After this analysis and determination of an insurance score, underwriters can provide a monthly premium estimate.

Teaching a driver through regular online training, such as “the hazards of distracted driving” or “how to do a pre-trip and post-trip inspection”, can help you keep your safety risk low.

Some of the easiest things to catch during a driver inspection are also the most common violations written up on a roadside inspection.

The more this information is top-of-mind for drivers, the better the chance they may drive safely.