

# NTSB Most Wanted List

Critical changes needed to reduce transportation accidents and save lives.

## *Eliminate Distraction in Transportation*

The National Transportation Safety Board is an independent Federal agency charged by Congress with investigating every civil aviation accident the United States and significant accidents in other modes of transportation – railroad, highway, marine and pipeline. The NTSB determines the probable cause of the accidents and issues safety recommendations aimed at preventing future accidents. In addition, the NTSB carries out special studies concerning transportation safety and coordinates the resources of the Federal Government and other organizations to provide assistance to victims and their family members impacted by major transportation disasters.



**National  
Transportation  
Safety Board**

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# Eliminate Distraction in Transportation

## What is the issue?

Over the past 10 years, the NTSB has investigated accidents that have demonstrated time and again the danger of using portable electronic devices while operating a vehicle, plane, train, or vessel. Talking hands-free on a cell phone led to a seasoned motorcoach driver colliding with a bridge in Alexandria, Virginia, in November 2004. Pilots overflowed their destination, Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport, by 100 miles in October 2009 because they were distracted by their laptops. In September 2008, an engineer ignored a red signal while texting, resulting in a head-on collision near Chatsworth, California, and 25 deaths. Two years later, in July 2010, a tugboat operator in the Delaware River in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, was paying more attention to his phone and laptop than to his job, which resulted in the tugboat/barge combination colliding with a passenger vessel and killing two tourists. The use of portable electronic devices in transportation has led to an increased number of crashes and an increased number of deaths.

Distraction in transportation, however, did not start with the advent of the cell phone and other portable electronic devices. The attention of a driver, pilot, or operator can be diverted by other internal or external sources. For teen drivers, other teen passengers in particular can take the driver's attention away from the primary task and lead to tragic consequences.

## What can be done . . .

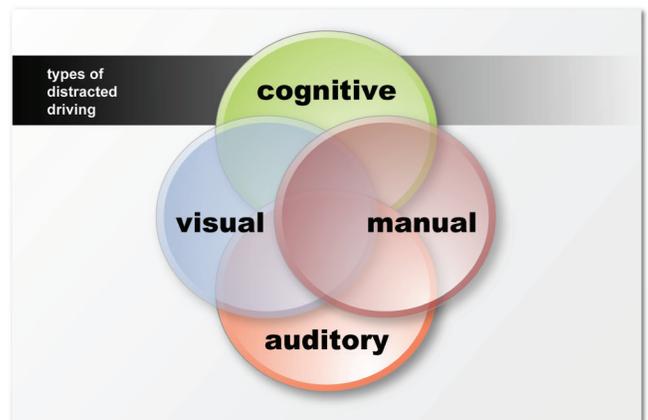
Portable electronic devices that do not directly support the task at hand have no place in vehicles, planes, trains, and vessels. States and regulators can set the proper tone by banning the nonessential use of such devices in transportation. Companies should develop and vigorously enforce policies to eliminate distractions. Manufacturers can assist by developing technology that disables the devices when in reach of operators. Accident investigators at the Federal, state, and local levels should also incorporate in their protocols a system for checking whether the nonessential use of portable electronic devices led to accidents; such information is essential to better identify safety issues and where to dedicate resources to stop this dangerous behavior.

Young drivers are more likely to use portable electronic devices while behind the wheel. Laws, education, and enforcement efforts should place special emphasis on curbing the use of portable electronic devices by these drivers. States must also understand that teen passengers increase crash risk for this population and should expand antidistracted campaigns to include banning teen passengers during the early licensing stages.

## Research

Two studies examining crash data, one published in the New England Journal of Medicine in 1997 and one published in the British Medical Journal in 2005, identified as much as a fourfold increase in crash risk when engaging in a cell phone conversation. More recently, researchers at Monash University in 2007 and at the University of Calgary in 2008 concluded that performance was degraded using both handheld and hands-free cell phones. In a 2010 naturalistic study of distraction in commercial trucks and buses, the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute determined that texting, e-mailing, or accessing the Internet increases the likelihood of an accident by more than 163 times.

Many people underestimate the risks of a phone conversation, believing that it is equivalent to chatting with a passenger. In a 2008 University of Utah study, researchers found that passengers take an active role in supporting the driver by more frequently talking about surrounding traffic and mentioning cues such as exit signs. The exception is when teen drivers transport their peers. Two recent studies by The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and State Farm Insurance revealed that teen drivers carrying multiple peer passengers were more likely to be thrill-seekers and more likely to be distracted prior to a crash. In the second study analyzing a nationally representative sample of 677 teen drivers involved in serious crashes, among those who said they were distracted by something inside the vehicle before they crashed, 71 percent of males and 47 percent of females said they were directly distracted by the actions of their passengers.



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