



# NTSB 2016 MOST WANTED TRANSPORTATION SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS

## DISCONNECT FROM DEADLY DISTRACTIONS



### *What is the issue?*

Quite simply, drivers, pilots, and other vehicle operators do not always have their minds on the road, waterway, sky, or track. But focusing on any other task other than what's up ahead impairs performance and can lead to deadly consequences.

It is not only portable electronic devices (PEDs) that can distract us during vehicle operations, although PEDs have magnified the dangers of distraction in recent years.

Since 2003, the NTSB has found PED distraction as a cause or contributing factor in accidents across all modes of transportation.

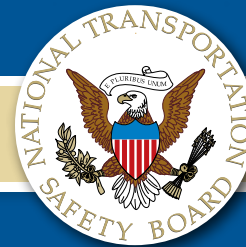
According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), 3,179 people died in 2014 in vehicle accidents where the driver was distracted. Many of those victims were the drivers themselves. NHTSA reports that drivers engaging in visual-manual tasks, such as dialing or texting, triple their risk of a crash.

In 2013, the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety reported that more than two out of three drivers indicated that they talked on a cell phone while driving within the past 30 days. More than one of three drivers admitted to reading a text message or e-mail while driving, and more than one of four drivers admitted to typing or sending a text or e-mail.

A 2015 report from State Farm revealed a new staggering trend: nearly 30 percent of drivers surveyed admitted to accessing the Internet while driving. That compares to just 13 percent who admitted to surfing the Web while driving in 2009.

In more heavily regulated transportation industries like aviation, marine and rail, communicating with crew and dispatchers, checking instruments and equipment, and handling scheduled procedures may be part of their work duties. But, like in private motor vehicles, engaging in tasks that don't support the driving or operating task can have deadly consequences.

## DISCONNECT FROM DEADLY DISTRACTIONS



### What can be done?

Since people have limited attention, each auxiliary task impairs our processing of the primary task. For safety-critical operations, distraction must be managed, even engineered, to ensure safe operations.

It will take a cultural change for drivers to understand that their safety depends on disconnecting from deadly distractions. In regulated transportation, the strict rules that already minimize the threat of distraction on paper must be embraced by every operator on every trip, and where we learn that distraction can be eliminated, reduced, or mitigated, regulators should act to do so.

The first step toward removing deadly distractions will be to disconnect from non-mission-critical information. For decades, aviation has recognized the need for "sterile cockpit" procedures that restrict activities and conversations to the task at hand. But all modes of transportation need to rise to today's distraction challenges. That's why, in December 2012, we called for a driver ban for all PEDs. We have issued similar recommendations for aviation, marine, and rail.

The public agrees. In June 2014, the National Safety Council reported that 73 percent of drivers think that more enforcement of texting laws is needed. And the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety reported that 85 percent of Americans think that other drivers who talk on cell phones are a threat to safety.

But currently only 14 states and the District of Columbia ban the use of hand-held cell phones while driving. The District of Columbia and 37 states restrict the use of cell phones by novice drivers, and 44 states and the District of Columbia ban text messaging while driving. None ban the use of hands-free devices.

Public education continues to be important for reaching drivers, operators, and safety-critical personnel about the dangers of distractions.

Likewise, we need to continue to build our technical understanding of distraction arising from auxiliary tasks in regulated transportation, especially as regards new vehicle technologies that require real-time operator attention. Advances in these areas will support regulatory efforts and lead us toward a cultural norm that encourages and supports operators to remain disconnected from deadly distractions.

## Critical changes needed to reduce transportation accidents and save lives



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The NTSB Most Wanted List highlights safety issues identified from the NTSB's accident investigations to increase awareness about the issues and promote recommended safety solutions.

The National Transportation Safety Board is an independent federal agency charged by Congress with investigating every civil aviation accident in 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.



#### \*RELATED ACCIDENTS:

**Aviation:** August 26, 2011; Mosby, MO; CEN11FA599; 4 dead

**Rail:** September 12, 2008; Chatsworth, CA; DCA08MR009; 25 dead

**Highway:** August 5, 2010; Gray Summit, MO; HWY10MH018; 2 dead

**Marine:** July 7, 2010; Philadelphia, PA; DCA10MM025; 2 dead

*\*For detailed accident reports, visit [www.nts.gov](http://www.nts.gov)*

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