

Distracted Driving

By Allen J. DeWalle
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On average, Americans spend over 300 hours per year in their cars. It is no wonder we find ourselves multitasking behind the wheel—eating a quick lunch, changing radio stations for the latest traffic report, and the list goes on and on. In fact, drivers have been documented reading, shaving, putting on makeup and watching television. Add cell phones to the list, and the number of distractions inside the vehicle is even greater.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates that distracted drivers are a factor in 25 percent to 50 per cent of all vehicle crashes; of the 6.5 million crashes reported each year, at least 1.5 million are related to distracted driving.

But distracted driving isn't a new issue. It's been around since the invention of windshield wipers in the early 1900s. Wipers, AM radios and a host of other innovations designed to enhance motorists' comfort, safety and convenience drew negative reaction until their benefits were understood and people learned to manage the distractions they caused.

The challenge today is to maximize the benefits of new conveniences while reducing the dangerous distractions associated with their use. AAA Mid-Atlantic supports the data-gathering efforts that are currently underway to help understand the level of distractions within a vehicle. But more important, our efforts are focused on educating the driving public on ways to complete attention and respect for the task at hand. If you find your mind wandering, it is up to you to refocus or stop driving.

Before getting behind the wheel, familiarize yourself with the features of your vehicle's equipment. Avoid smoking, eating, drinking and reading while driving. Review maps before hitting the road so you don't find yourself pulling them out while traveling 55 m.p.h. Turn safely off the road and out of traffic to deal with children's needs, and do your personal grooming at home—not in the car.

If using a cell phone is unavoidable, use it at a safe time and place. Avoid taking calls while driving, and instead use the message-taking function of your phone.

Keep the conversation short, and postpone emotional or complex conversations until you are off the road.