



U.S. ARMY COMBAT READINESS CENTER

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READY **...OR NOT?**

Last call

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About every 30 seconds in the United States, a driver using a cellphone is involved in a crash. In an effort to curb these preventable accidents, the National Safety Council is asking motorists to put down the phone and focus on the task at hand: driving.

The NSC estimates nearly 25 percent of vehicle crashes involve drivers either talking — both handheld and hands free — or texting on a cellphone. Thousands die each year as a result of these accidents.

“Drivers talking on handheld or hands-free cellphones are four times as likely to be involved in a crash, and 9 percent of all drivers are using cellphones at any given daylight moment, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration,” said David Teater, senior director of Transportation Initiatives at the NSC.

This April, in recognition of National Distracted Driving Awareness Month, the NSC is urging motorists to take a pledge to drive cell-free. Teater said more than 30 studies show hands-free devices do not offer drivers any safety benefit because they do not eliminate cognitive distraction.

“Our brains just do not let us perform two cognitively demanding tasks, such as driving and talking on a cellphone, at the same time,” Teater said. “Instead, the brain has to prioritize one task over the other and, unfortunately, the cellphone conversation takes precedence. This means a driver is not concentrating solely on the road when he or she is talking on a cellphone. Once we realized its significant risk, we knew we had to call for a total ban on cellphone use while driving.”

In an effort to address the distracted driving problem, the U.S. Department of Transportation has banned commercial drivers from using cellphones while operating their vehicles, encouraged states to adopt tough laws and launched campaigns to raise public awareness about the dangers of texting and cellphone use behind the wheel.

Department of Defense and Army leaders have also taken steps to reduce distracted driving accidents. DOD Instruction 6055.04 prohibits personnel from text messaging or engaging in any other form of electronic data communication while driving government-owned vehicles on or off military installations, and while driving any vehicle, regardless of duty status, with government-supplied electronic equipment. It also discourages the use of hands-free devices, which inhibit safe driving.

While texting or talking on a cellphone are often viewed as the most dangerous distractions for drivers, other non-driving tasks such as eating, changing radio stations, adjusting climate controls,

grooming and rubbernecking can be just as hazardous, said Lt. Col. Joseph Harvey, director of the U.S. Army Combat Readiness Center's Driving Directorate.

"Anything that takes your eyes and attention from the task of driving your vehicle safely should be avoided," Harvey said. "The best way to limit these distractions is to allow a passenger to do it for you. If you are alone, pull over or wait until stopped at a traffic signal to address non-driving tasks."

Nearly every state has adopted some sort of distracted driving law. Currently, 12 states prohibit motorists from using handheld cellphones while driving; however, none ban all cellphone use for all drivers.

Teater said hands-free device laws only give drivers a false sense of security.

"Public opinion surveys have shown drivers are becoming less tolerant of handheld cellphone use, but the majority still feel hands-free devices are a safer alternative," he said. "We want to help people understand why this isn't the case. ... (Hands-free devices) do not eliminate the crash risk. Drivers may have both hands on the wheel and their eyes on the road, but their mind still is not on driving, which is where it needs to be."

For more information on driving safety, visit <https://safety.army.mil>.