

Hands-Free Cellular Phones; Greatest Hidden Public Hazard on the Roadway

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Cellular phone companies and government legislation have expressed support for handsfree cell phone use as solution for the increased deaths resulting from cellular phone use while driving. Voice activation for dialing and hands free features do improve performance of cell phone users in driving conditions, but this just sidesteps the real issue: conversation. According to research conducted by Strayer, Drews and Crouch in 2003, participants who conversed on the cell while driving were more dangerous to other drivers than participants that did not converse, but were legally intoxicated.

External factors (dialing, answering the phone, etc.) of cellular use have received much attention and resolution from both government and corporate level. These factors do have a negative impact on the driver's performance, but the impact is small in comparison to internal factors (conversing) that effect performance. For example, the driver can decide to wait to dial or answer the phone until they are stopped or in a less attention-demanding situation, but the driver has no control over the complexity or pace of conversation once they are talking. If the driver is involved in conversation and driving demands suddenly increase, the driver will be less able to respond. If conversation is the problem, why are passengers allowed to talk in the car? What is the difference between a person having a conversation with you in the car versus on a cell phone? If you are communicating with a person inside the vehicle, they are receiving the same context or visual cues as the driver. For example, if driving conditions are more complex, the rate and complexity of conversation may decrease therefore lessening the driver's response difficulty. On the other hand, if the driver is conversing with someone who is not in the car, the

conversation will continue in speed and complexity since the person is not in the car and does not pick-up those attention-demanding cues a passenger would. For example, a person communicating from a quiet office may speak at a higher rate that is inappropriate for someone driving. In that instance, the driver may allocate too much mental power to processing the conversation and too little for driving.

Current research on driving and cell phone use should frighten current users, (David Strayer and William Johnston, 2001; Miguel Recarte and Luis Nunes, 2003; David Strayer, Frank Drews and William Johnston, 2003). Researchers have found through high-tech experiments (Vehicle Simulation) that cell phone use decreases the driver's performance by splitting his/her attention even when using a hands-free operation.

According to Strayer, Drews and Johnston in 2003, about half of their participants admitted that it was more difficult to drive while conversing on a cell phone, but hardly any suggested that it decreased their performance (when in fact it did). Participants also reported seeing other drivers using a cell driving irregularly.

To all of the readers who use cell phones while driving, here are the facts. It is safer to use hands-free communication, keep you conversations simple and short, expect to increase your accident likelihood by four times, don't expect to remember any specific information about things you pass on the road and keep in mind that your reaction time will decrease so follow other vehicles at a further distance. For everyone's safety when the phone rings pull over and then answer it.

Work Cited

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