

Distracted Driving Prevention: Overview

5-Minute Talk

Distractions have always been a risk for drivers, but today's distractions are more frequent and more complicated than ever. We have a population that often has too much to do and too little time. Many people use their driving time to multi-task behind the wheel.

Recognizing Distractions

Personal devices like cellphones are some of the most common and most dangerous types of distractions. Texting while driving is especially dangerous because it takes away everything you need to be safe: your eyes, hands, and mind.

Vehicle Technologies like GPS systems and touchscreens for entertainment can be a distraction. There are some required technologies for professional drivers like electronic logging devices and dash cameras. These gadgets might increase safety and convenience in many ways, but they can also increase driver risk and distraction if not used properly.

Anything you touch, besides your driving controls, are **physical distractions**. They take your hands off the wheel and your eyes off the road.

Other types of distractions fall into two categories: **Visual** and **Mental**.

Visual distractions lure your eyes off the road, such as a fancy car, a herd of deer, beautiful scenery, or a crash scene. If you need to check something out, find a place to park your vehicle and then look.

Mental distractions draw your mind away from driving. Some examples are planning your schedule, worrying about where you need to be, or daydreaming about your next vacation. Be careful! Mental distractions can make you completely blind to hazards, earning them names like inattention blindness and highway hypnosis.

Avoid Distractions

Avoid being distracted while on the road by preparing for distractions before you start your trip:

- **Program** your GPS,
- **Set** your radio or entertainment player,
- **Make** any necessary calls, and
- **Check** your directions and/or instructions.

Keep distractions to a minimum. Be prepared before you start your trip. Think about your trip before it begins. You should focus on four activities for safe driving:

- **Scan** the road;
- **Check** mirrors;
- **Read** instruments, gauges, and other essential controls; and
- **Operate** the vehicle safely.

Distracted Driving Prevention: Responding to Distracted Drivers

5-Minute Talk

Too many drivers make a conscious choice to distract themselves from driving. You know you have to be a focused driver. It's also important for you to be aware of the unfocused drivers around you.

Identifying Signs of Distracted Drivers

It's often easy to spot a distracted driver by simply watching their vehicle. When you observe the following behaviors, assume that the driver involved may be distracted:

- **Action in the driver's seat.**
 - Driver texting or talking on a cell phone,
 - Sudden movement inside the vehicle, or
 - Driver's head turns too much or too often.
- **Excessive speed** may be a sign. If a driver is singing, talking on the phone, or looking away from the road, their excessive speed may be the result of distracted driving.
- **Slow speed** can also be a warning sign. As with excessive speed, the driver involved is probably unaware of the pace kept by other vehicles on the surrounding road.
- **Erratic speed** may also indicate distracted driving. Watch for drivers who speed up, then slow down without reason.
- **Cutting off other drivers** can be another sign that someone is distracted or not paying attention.
- **Breaking traffic rules** might also be a signal of driver distraction. Watch for drivers who run stop signs or traffic signals. They may pass in a no passing zone or disobey other road rules.
- **Tailgating** is often thought to be rude or a sign of impatience. It may also be a sign that the driver is too distracted to recognize the unsafe following distance.

Safe Responses

After you've given yourself some extra space, consider the following safe responses, and decide which move is right for you:

- **Move to the right lane** if the driver is behind you and you're on a multi-lane road. This will encourage a distracted driver to pass you. If they're in front of you, you're in a better position to keep an eye on them.
- **Signal and pull off the road** if the driver is behind you and you're on a one-lane road. Do this as soon as it's safe to create more space between you and the distracted driver. The few moments of time you may lose by stopping can't compare with the hours, days, or weeks that might be lost in a crash.
- **Establish eye contact** if you can't create a safety cushion or move out of their way. If you make eye contact, the other driver should be aware of you, but it's no guarantee. The driver could have "inattention blindness" and might not see you because his or her mind is somewhere else.

Unsafe Responses

Dealing with distracted drivers can be frustrating, especially when you know it puts your safety at risk. It's still important to stay calm. Reacting out of anger will only put you and others in harm's way.

Avoid situations that can result in road rage, including:

- Tailgating,
- Cutting off another vehicle, or
- Directing threatening gestures at another motorist.

Even if you aren't trying to start a fight, a distracted driver could misinterpret your actions as aggressive. For this reason, **avoid** trying to get the driver's attention by:

- Flashing your lights,
- Honking your horn, or
- Making rude or threatening gestures.