



RISK BULLETIN



Electronic Distractions While Driving

Cell phones, PDAs, pagers, wireless laptops, and video or CD players have turned our vehicles into rolling offices and entertainment centers.

But driving and operating such devices creates distractions that draw attention away from the primary function of the driver, which is to operate the vehicle safely.

EFFECTS OF DISTRACTIONS

Studies show that any type of distraction increases driver reaction time and decreases driving performance, increasing the likelihood of accidents. This occurs because multi-tasking places too many demands on the driver's attention and leaves him or her with decreased ability to identify a problem and react to it in a safe and appropriate manner. Distractions also induce a state known as "inattention blindness" in which drivers operate on "auto pilot" without actually "seeing" the traffic and road conditions around them. Inattention blindness becomes highly dangerous when a distracted driver is confronted with unexpected events that require immediate action. Anticipating and reacting appropriately to surprises requires thought, planning, and full attention.

SAFETY TIPS

Common sense behavior is required to maintain

safe driving practices. The following should be considered:

- Restrict use of electronic devices to safe times. Make every effort to park safely before talking on the phone or using other equipment. Schedule your calls so that your attention focuses on safe driving.
- If you must use the phone or other equipment while driving, keep it within easy reach. If you drop equipment, do not take your eyes off the road or lean over in the seat to recover it.
- Do not talk on the phone or use electronic devices during hazardous driving conditions such as heavy traffic, hazardous weather, or times of reduced visibility (including night driving). Voice mail is designed to answer the phone when you cannot. Let it do its job.
- Inform callers that you are driving and that you may hang up at any time. Hang up immediately if talking is a distraction or safety is jeopardized.
- Emotional, stressful, or complicated business conversations are particularly distracting and lead to unsafe driving. Tell the caller you will call back within a certain timeframe so you can give them your undivided attention. Then find a safe place to park.
- Do not read while driving, or enter numbers and coordinates into electronic devices.
- Video games and DVD players are for the use of passengers only. Such devices should be located to the rear of the driver and kept at a volume that is not distracting.
- The safety of the driver, the passengers in the vehicle, and the other drivers on the road must take precedence. Your first responsibility is to pay attention to your safe driving duties.

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XL Insurance
Risk Control Division
505 Eagleview Boulevard
Suite 100
PO Box 636
Exton, PA 19341-0636
Phone: +1 800-327-1414
Fax: +1 610-458-7285
www.xlinsurance.com/environmental

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