

# RISK COMMUNIQUÉ

## *Driving Distracted*

*With more than 90 percent of motor vehicle crashes caused by human error, organizations with high roadway exposure are at risk for a serious crash resulting in a lawsuit against their organization. Damages awarded to plaintiffs making negligence claims against companies are at an all time high, with settlements of \$1 million or more not unusual. (Source: [www.trafficsafety.org](http://www.trafficsafety.org))*

### **There are three main types of distraction:**

- Visual — taking your eyes off the road
- Manual — taking your hands off the wheel
- Cognitive — taking your mind off what you're doing

Distracted driving is any non-driving activity a person engages in that has the potential to distract him or her from the primary task of driving. While all distractions can endanger drivers' safety, texting involves all three types of distraction.

### **Some surprising distracted driving facts:**

- 20 percent of injury crashes and 16 percent of fatal crashes in 2009 involved reports of distracted driving (NHTSA)
- Of those killed in distracted driving-related crashes, 995 involved reports of a cell phone as a distraction (18 percent of fatalities in distraction-related crashes).
- The proportion of fatalities reportedly associated with driver distraction increased from 10 percent in 2005 to 16 percent in 2009.
- Of those drivers reportedly distracted during a fatal crash, the 30-to-39-year-old drivers were the group with the greatest proportion distracted by cell phones at 24 percent.
- **Using a cell phone while driving, whether it's hand-held or hands-free, delays a driver's reactions as much as having a blood alcohol concentration at the legal limit of .08 percent.** (Source: *University of Utah study*)

While these numbers are significant, they may not state the true size of the problem. The identification of distraction and its role in a crash can be very difficult to determine using only police-reported data. When drivers who had an accident or near-accident due to distracted driving were asked, many said they would repeat the hazardous behavior.

### **What can you do to limit the risk to your organization of distracted driving?**

- **Announce your commitment to employee safety**  
According to the National Safety Council, businesses that allow their employees to conduct business on cell phones while driving are putting them at four times a greater risk of a crash. Company policies on cell phone use and employee training on driver safety issues can demonstrate an organization's commitment to a safe workplace.
- **Policy/Procedure**

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Consider implementation of a corporate cell phone ban and a policy on distracted driving. A 2010 employee survey taken by the National Safety Council found that:

- 37 percent of organizations ban **all** driver cell phone use.
- 28 percent ban handheld driver cell phone use.
- 35 percent have no formal policy on cell phone use or distracted driving.

An organizational cell phone ban might ask employees to:

- Turn off wireless phones or other devices before starting the car.
- Inform family, clients and co-workers that they cannot pick up or return calls while they are driving.
- Pull over to a safe location and put the vehicle in park if a call must be made.
- Sign an attestation or safety acknowledgement that they agree to abide by the policy.

**Ninety- nine percent of organizations with total cell phone bans that responded to a recent National Safety council survey saw no decrease in employee productivity.**

- ***Actively investigate each incident of an on the job motor vehicle accident***  
Accident reporting and investigation can prove beneficial to the employer and employee. It allows for identification of how and where risks in the workplace arise. The process may also provide additional knowledge as to how to prevent this same type of accident - or other similar types of accidents - from recurring.
- ***Educate your staff on the risks of distracted driving***  
There are resources available to assist with employee education, including a government Web site, [www.distraction.gov](http://www.distraction.gov). Many employees will recognize that any distraction while driving is a potential risk, but it is important to reinforce this through policy/procedure and regular employee training programs and updates.