

TRUCK TALK

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Driving Distractions

Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood announced that text messaging is forbidden while driving commercial motor vehicles, and instituted steep fines for violators.

Distracted Driving is rapidly becoming a national problem, and while the focus is on cell phone usage, there are many other driving distractions that can be hazardous:

- Reading GPS devices or the old road map
- Drinking coffee or soft drinks
- Eating
- Smoking
- Adjusting music or heat/AC controls
- Daydreaming

Some studies say that up to 80% of all crashes involve some form of driver inattention within 3 seconds before the incident. Any activity that makes you lose your focus on what you are doing, take your eyes off the road, or cause you to take a hand off the steering wheel is dangerous for both you and the motorists around your vehicle.

Consider this situation: You are driving down the Interstate at 70 mph. You reach down to get your coffee out of the cup holder, or you reach into your pocket for your cigarettes and lighter, or you take a bite out of that cheeseburger you got back at the store, or you thought you heard your cell phone beep and you decide to check it for a voice or text message. It just takes you a couple of seconds. That's all. Just a couple of seconds. Do you realize that you traveled 206 feet in that couple of seconds? Two-thirds the length of a football field. Remember the part where distracted driving contributes to 8 out of 10 crashes?

When driving, keep your mind engaged with driving-related information. There is a lot going on around you as you traveled that last mile in less than a minute. Inattention or other mental activities distracting you from driving can cause you to gaze

blindly at the road or objects ahead without actually seeing or recognizing them because your attention is focused somewhere else. Ever had one of those moments when you think "I wonder what happened to the last 10 miles. I don't remember going by that last exit".

Cell phones have the distinction of being particularly efficient at causing you to be distracted. Cell phone usage fits into all 4 of the major distraction categories:

- Visual – requires you to have to take your eyes off the road to dial
- Auditory – requires you to listen to the message or the person on the other end
- Mechanical – requires you to operate them manually
- Cognitive – requires you to engage in a mental task other than driving

What can you do to reduce your instances of driver distraction?

- Hang up the phone. Put it where you can't get to it from the driver's seat.
- Avoid smoking while driving. What happens if you drop your cigarette while going 70?
- Minimize eating and drinking while driving. Eating and drinking creates both a physical and visual distraction as you are steering with one hand while juggling the food or drink with the other.
- Do not fixate on non-driving related objects. Keeping your focus on driving-related information helps you be more aware of your surroundings and the hazards that are lurking there.

You as the professional are the one who make allowances for the lack of skill and the lack of knowledge on the part of the other driver. You are the one who has no control over the unpredictable action of others, or over the weather or road conditions. You are the one who makes concessions to avoid collisions with the other drivers. Please be the one who does not allow distracted driving to be a part of your job as a professional driver.

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