

TRUCK TALK

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Smart Driving

What is the most important thing you will do today? Regardless of what you do for a living each day, getting home safely at the end of the day is Job #1. With that in mind, a recent federal government study indicates that distracted drivers are the leading cause of crashes in the United States, accounting for 80% of crashes and 65% of near-crashes. Yet motor vehicle crashes that are the result of distracted driving are predictable, preventable, and within a driver's control. That's why they are referred to as "crashes" and not "accidents".

Whether you are driving as a function of your job, or are commuting to and from work, the time spent behind the wheel can be the most dangerous part of your day. According to the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, drivers make an average of 20 major decisions during every mile of driving. Answering a phone call, picking up something dropped on the floor, checking how you look in the mirror, eating – are things that distract you from making good driving decisions. Are these things really worth the risk while driving?

The ability to multi-task is a myth, according to researchers. People do not do many things simultaneously; however, we switch our attention from one thing to another rather quickly. Thus, we are not driving and talking – we are driving or talking. We are not driving and eating – we are driving or eating. When you are driving, you must coordinate the actions of your hands, feet, eyes, ears, and other body movements. At the same time, you must decide how to react to what you see, hear, smell, or feel in relation to other vehicles around you. At the same time, you must also process the information regarding signal lights, yield signs, pedestrian traffic, and countless other stimuli.

At the same time, you have mere seconds to decide if you need to speed, up, slow down, stop, change lanes, or a combination of those movements. Is it really smart driving to add non-driving tasks to the list of things you must do while driving your vehicle?

Here are some basic actions you can take to practice Smart Driving:

- If you receive a call while you are driving, let the message center take the call, and once you are parked in a safe location, check the message center and return the call.
- If you call someone on their cell phone, ask them if they are driving. If they are, ask them to call you back when it is safe for them to do so.
- If you do multi-task, like changing the radio station or getting a drink from a bottle of water, consider your vehicle's surroundings and pick times when exposures are reduced.
- Buckle up every time you get into a vehicle. It is the most important way you can protect yourself from the distracted drivers out there on the nation's highways.
- Remember that multi-tasking is a myth. When driving, concentrate on the driving actions necessary to complete your trip. Leave the non-driving actions for another time. You either control your vehicle, or it controls you.

Please practice Smart Driving every time you get behind the wheel of any vehicle. It is the professional thing to do, and it is the right thing to do.

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