

Cell Phones - Invaluable Tool or Dangerous Distraction?

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Have you ever seen someone driving poorly or erratically, and when you get a clear view of the driver, you find out they are talking or texting on a cell phone? It's dangerous and yet it's almost as if talking on a cell phone gives people the right to not pay attention to traffic signals, merging traffic, lane barricades, traffic signs, etc.

A new study by Virginia Tech Transportation Institute found that texting while driving has the highest crash risk of all cell-phone related tasks and more than previously estimated. The real-world study used cameras and sensors in participants' personal vehicles to observe the cell phone use of light vehicle and truck drivers. The results show that manually texting and dialing cell phones caused a significant increase in crash risk. Texting was associated with the highest risk — 23.2 times greater than when not texting. Using or just reaching for a phone was associated with about six times greater risk, and talking on or listening to a cell phone was 1.3 times as high as non-distracted driving.

Cell phones aren't really a luxury anymore. They have become a required tool of the construction industry. What would we do without them? More to the point, how can we use them safely?

Following are some cell phone safety tips to follow while driving:

- Try to avoid making calls or texting while you're driving.
- If you must call or text while driving, pull over at a safe location and then use your phone, or wait until congestion eases and roadways are safer.
- Don't answer the phone if you're in a difficult driving situation. It's not worth risking an accident.
- If you're talking and the situation becomes hazardous, hang up or stop talking and concentrate on the road.
- Position your phone where you can easily reach it.
- Consider installing a hands-free phone in your vehicle. (However, the above safety tips would still apply.)

On an active jobsite, the background noise of back up alarms on equipment and noisy engines of trucks and heavy equipment moving across a jobsite can make it difficult to hear someone on the other end of a cell phone. The high level of concentration it takes to hear a conversation on a cell phone takes the focus off the work going on in the surrounding area and can lead to accidents. Some tips to keep in mind for safe cell phone use on an active construction jobsite are:

- Limit the use of cell phones by people working in an active area of the jobsite.
- If you are in an active jobsite area and your phone rings, either don't answer it and return the call when it's safe to do so, or answer the phone and tell the caller to wait while you carefully walk to a safe area. When possible, consider turning your cell phone off while you are working in active jobsite areas.
- If you see someone talking on a cell phone and standing in an active jobsite area, recognize that they are probably not fully aware of activities going on around them and make a point to watch out for them.

A cell phone is a useful tool and a potentially dangerous distraction. The next time your cell phone rings with a call or a text, think about where you are and whether it's safe to respond. The life you save may be your own or a co-worker's.

Safety First!

Sourced in part from Virginia Tech Transportation Institute at
www.vtti.vt.edu/PDF/7-22-09-VTTI-Press_Release_Cell_phones_and_Driver_Distractio.pdf



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Company Name
Project #/Name

Date

Meeting Location

Person Conducting Meeting

Items Discussed

Problem Areas or Concerns

Attendees

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Comments
