



## RIP & SHARE SAFETY HANDOUT

# Multitasking Causes Distraction

# Distractions Cause Accidents



Multitasking, or performing more than one action simultaneously, can seem efficient. However, in some cases, multitasking also can cause more harm than good. According to a study conducted by researchers at the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute (VTTI), “inattention, distraction and driver fatigue [were] shown to be factors in crashes.”

Using cellular phones while driving takes your attention away from the road, and this action triples the likelihood of a crash. “According to studies conducted by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), some form of driver distraction is a contributing factor in 20-30 percent of all crashes.” Therefore, multitasking while operating a vehicle leads to inattention. Inattention causes deadly accidents.

According to the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), 70-80 percent of transportation accidents are the result of human error. Guess what the human error is? We all know what it is because we have committed it ourselves. The human error is: the driver was not looking at the road. He or she was multitasking (doing something else while driving), and this required taking their eyes off the road for just a second. One highway patrolman said the funniest excuse he had ever heard was, “I was just driving down the road and from out of nowhere the car jumped in front of me.” Think about what the driver is saying. It is simple, “I had to do something that required me to take my



eyes off the road.” The Virginia Tech survey also found that reaching for a moving object while operating a vehicle increased the chance of crashing by nine times. When attention is taken away from driving, reaction time is slowed, therefore making accidents a greater possibility than if all energies were focused on the task at hand.

Activities such as reading, grooming, speaking on cellular phones and checking e-mails all compromise the ability to focus on the road. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has said: “Because driving requires full attention and focus...hands-free or hand-held cell phones [cause] cognitive distractions significant enough to degrade a driver’s performance. This can cause a driver to miss key visual and audio cues needed to avoid a crash.”

So what is the bottom line? Any type of multitasking, especially while operating heavy mobile equipment, or while working around congested areas where traffic is present, can impair an individual’s ability to concentrate. This inattention can cause accidents with fatal consequences.

The next time you are operating mobile equipment and your cell phone rings, resist the urge to answer that cell phone. Or how about when you take your eyes off the road to pick up that bottle of water you dropped? Take the time to pull over to a safe area and park. Then pick up that bottle or return a call. The same goes for eating while operating mobile equipment. Don’t eat and drive. Highway patrol officers comment that when they see a car weaving, most of the time it is because the driver is eating.

If you are walking or working in an area where traffic exists, take the time to communicate with the equipment operator and pay attention to the activity occurring around you. If you must make a phone call or read something, go to an area where there is no traffic. Protect yourself by paying attention to what is going on around you. ■

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