

Distracted Driving

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I live on a busy street in a small central Illinois town. My son and I like to sit in the swing on our front porch and he waves at the cars going by. On some days, we easily see 10 cars pass by within as many minutes. It's common to see drivers looking down at their phones and it's not just the young kids, either – it's all genders, all ages. I would be lying if I didn't include myself in the distracted driving dilemma.

Whether it's looking at a map or texting a friend that you're running late, distracted driving has become a consequence of our society's need to be constantly informed. While my observations from the porch swing aren't exactly science, it does make you wonder – what is SO important that it is worth risking life?

Looking at your phone while driving may seem like something you can do quickly and without harm to yourself or others, but it *significantly* increases your risk for being involved in an accident or worse, causing death. **Distracted driving is driving while doing another activity that takes your attention away from driving.** It includes everyday behaviors like drinking a beverage, adjusting the AC, and looking at something happening on the side of the road.

There are three main types of distraction for drivers:

- Visual: taking your eyes off the road;
- Manual: taking your hands off of the wheel; and
- Cognitive: taking your mind off driving.

Texting happens to cover all three types, which makes it particularly dangerous! [Illinois state law](#) prohibits the use of hand-held cellphones, texting or any other electronic communication while operating a vehicle. You will be issued a maximum \$75 ticket for your first offense, and it increases with each offense. Technology such as hands-free mode in the car and voice-to-text recognition are designed to help us be safer while driving, but even with those products, you are at a minimum distracted cognitively.

There is no safe way to both drive a vehicle and use a cellphone, hands-free or otherwise. Ask yourself if using your cell phone while driving is *really* necessary. Decide what should have your attention *right now and use mindfulness!* If you need to use your cell phone, even with hands-free technology, it is recommended that you pull off to the side of the road first. This simple act could make all the difference! ■