DID YOU KNOW???

DISTRACTED DRIVER STUDY REVEALS DANGERS

Figuring out the role cellphone use and other distracting behaviors play in crashes is a challenge for researchers, according to an article in the December issue of “Status Report” from the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS). To get more data, an IIHS analyses of a naturalistic driving study, in which a group of drivers are continuously monitored over an extended period of time, provided new evidence that using cellphones, eating or drinking, and interacting with an in-vehicle system all increase the odds of a crash. In the study, more than 3,000 drivers were monitored for up to three years.

The 1,465 crashes recorded in the study vary in severity. Not surprisingly, the least severe crashes are the most common. And when IIHS researchers looked at the effect of distracting behaviors on crash risk, they discovered there are big differences depending on the severities of crashes included.

Of the crashes recorded, 42 percent are low-risk tire strikes, which include things like a tire hitting a curb or briefly going up on the curb. Most drivers likely wouldn't even consider these to be crashes and in some cases might not even notice them. Another 41 percent of the crashes are classified as minor, while 10 percent include sufficient damage to be police-reportable, and seven percent were classified as "most severe." The most severe category includes crashes that involve an airbag deployment, injury or a high change in speed at impact.

Relative to driving without any secondary behavior, the odds of a crash of any type were significantly higher when drivers were engaged in any secondary behavior, when they were manipulating cellphones and when they were interacting with an in-vehicle system. Of all activities analyzed, manipulating a cellphone was associated with the biggest crash risk — about 5 times the odds of crashing while driving without any secondary behavior. Earlier naturalistic studies also found that manipulating a cellphone increased the risk of a crash or near crash. A new finding is that simply talking on a cellphone also significantly increases the odds of a crash when tire strikes are excluded.

The study doesn't address what policies might reduce the types of distraction that lead to crashes. Earlier research by IIHS and Highway Loss Data Institute (HLDI) has found that cellphone and texting bans reduce phone use, but not crashes. The researchers hypothesized that drivers who refrained from using their phones manually may have switched to hands-free systems, which also can be distracting, or may have been distracted by something else.

"Our understanding of the role cellphones play in crashes continues to evolve," says Anne McCartt, IIHS senior vice president for research and a co-author of the new study. "Although this study shows that manipulating a cellphone is more risky than some other secondary behaviors, it's important to remember that drivers are distracted in many other ways, and putting down the phone does not mean a driver is paying attention to the road. An approach that addresses all kinds of distraction, instead of focusing specifically on cellphones, will be most successful in improving safety."

Driving is a task that requires 100% of your attention. Resist distracting temptations and pay full attention to your driving. No matter how well you think you can multi-task, it isn’t worth the risk.