



## Distractions: Dangerous for Drivers



Distracted Driving is common, though difficult to define, observe and measure. Recent distracted driving attention has concentrated on cell phones, but other distractions are more common and appear to contribute to more crashes.

Distractions take a driver's attention away from driving. A distraction can be produced by something a driver sees or hears, some physical task not directly involved in driving (such as eating or operating the car radio), or mental activities (such as conversations with passengers or on a cell phone).

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) surveyed 4,010 drivers and asked about a variety of potentially distracting behaviors. The vast majority reported these behaviors on some trips, often on many or most trips. The most common were:

- ◆ 81 % talked to other passengers
- ◆ 66 % changed radio stations or looked for CD's
- ◆ 49 % ate or drank
- ◆ 26 % took incoming calls on a cell phone and 25 % made outgoing calls
- ◆ 24 % dealt with children in the backseat
- ◆ 12 % read a map or directions

About one-quarter of the drivers reported that they had been involved in a crash in the previous five years. About 14 percent attributed their crash to distracted driving. The true role of distraction in crashes is likely higher, because pre-crash distractions often leave no evidence for law enforcement officers or crash investigators to observe. A recent study that monitored 100 drivers for a year, using specialized instrumentation, reported that nearly 80 percent of the 72 recorded crashes and 65 percent of the 761 near-crashes involved driver inattention just prior to the incident.

The obvious way to reduce distracted driving crashes is to convince drivers to pay attention to their driving, but this can be very difficult. Many drivers consider some distractions such as eating or drinking, listening to the radio, or talking on a cell phone, to be important and common activities that they are unlikely to give up.

**Behavioral strategies** designed to reduce distracted driving attempt to remove some of the underlying causes and to promote awareness of the risks.

Enforcement of traffic laws are used successfully for alcohol impairment, safety belt use, aggressive driving, and speeding, but are unlikely to be effective for distracted drivers. One exception is some graduated driver licensing provisions that help reduce distractions by limiting the number of passengers or restricting cell phone use.

**Environmental strategies** can also address distracted driving. Rumble strips have demonstrated their effectiveness in preventing crashes caused by inattention or fatigue. Other roadway improvements, such as wide and visible edge lines, more easily visible road signs, and better lighting at night, can help drivers who are not fully alert.

**Vehicular strategies** also affect driver distraction and fatigue. In-car television, navigation devices, and other new technologies may create more potential distractions. On the other hand, in-vehicle technology may be able to detect driver distraction or fatigue by monitoring driver performance. The important thing to remember with vehicular strategies is that drivers need to pay attention while driving and not rely on their vehicle's technology to identify potential problems.

To learn more about safe driving habits attend the Utah Safety Council's 4-hour defensive driving course. Visit our website at [www.utahsafetycouncil.org](http://www.utahsafetycouncil.org) or call us for more information at (800) 933-5943.



Source: Safety Pro Spring 2007

## 10 Things You Need To Know About Commercial Vehicle Brakes



1. Commercial vehicles are powered forward by fuel. They are stopped by brakes that use heat as their energy source. Brakes are vital to the safe operation of a vehicle because they enable the vehicle to stop.
2. Braking systems are complicated and contain many parts that need constant inspection and attention to ensure proper operation and performance.
3. To be able to rely on your brakes in every driving situation, they must be properly adjusted, maintained and inspected before every trip.
4. Poor brake adjustment reduces the ability of the service brakes to stop a vehicle and also reduces the ability of the emergency/parking brakes to stop and/or hold a vehicle.
5. By far, brakes comprise the largest percentage of out-of service violations cited during roadside inspections.
6. The only way to know when you have a brake problem is to measure the stroke.
7. Highway design engineers often do not know the margin of safety for trucks in their design. As a result, even if your brakes are adjusted properly, and you are able to see a potential problem ahead, your chances of stopping are less than that of car drivers.
8. Highway warning signs are usually for automobile drivers; truck drivers must translate them for trucks.
9. Be especially careful about how you apply your brakes when driving in mountainous areas.
10. Additional factors, besides brakes, that affect the vehicles' ability to stop include: tire compound and tread depth, loading and dynamic weight shift, vehicle speed, driver condition, mental state, knowledge of surroundings, traffic congestion, pavement surface characteristics and stopping-sight distance.

Source: *Utah Trucking, Issue 5 2006*

## The Speed Factor



Pinpointing the precise factor that caused a particular vehicle crash is difficult. In most cases, a crash is a result of a number of factors related to the driver, the vehicle and the road itself.

However, research shows that driver behavior definitely

influences the likelihood of a collision. According to the National Safety Council, improper driving behaviors were involved in 61 percent of the 10.9 million motor vehicle crashes that occurred in 2004. Speeding is the most commonly reported improper behavior in fatal crashes.

According to the Illinois Department of Motor Vehicles, both driving too fast and driving too slowly can pose risks. Drivers should stay as close to the posted speed limit as possible, although weather and traffic conditions may make it necessary to proceed more slowly.

One key factor that should influence your driving speed decisions is your ability to stop. The Illinois

Department of Motor Vehicles recommends drivers consider these factors:

- ◆ Design, weight distribution, suspension and shock absorbers of your vehicle.
- ◆ Driver's physical and mental reaction time.
- ◆ Direction and speed of the wind.
- ◆ Type and condition of the roadway.
- ◆ Type, condition and adjustment of your brakes.
- ◆ Type of tires on your vehicle and the condition of the tread.

### Free Materials Available

Drive Friendly Stickers  
Road Rage Brochures  
Buckle Up For Love Posters and Brochures

To request free materials, contact Hollie Davis at 800-933-5943 ext. 303 or through email at [hdavis@utahsafetycouncil.org](mailto:hdavis@utahsafetycouncil.org)

Source: *Traffic Safety March 2007*



## New Coordinator



The NETS program has undergone a significant change in the last month. Hollie Davis is the new NETS coordinator.

She has been with the Utah Safety Council for a year and a half and she has been a great asset to the organization. Hollie currently works with several other programs including, child passenger safety, indoor air quality, driver education and many other community programs.

Hollie attended the University of Utah and received her degree in Health Promotion and Education. She

is also a Certified Health Education Specialist and a Certified Child Passenger Safety Technician. You can contact Hollie via email at [hdavis@utahsafetycouncil.org](mailto:hdavis@utahsafetycouncil.org) or by phone at (800) 933-5943 ext. 303.

We look forward to assisting you in your traffic safety program development and we hope you use the NETS program to its full potential.

Utah NETS and the Utah Safety Council partner with other organizations to bring you up-to-date traffic safety information. We appreciate your dedication to the health and safety of your organization.

Thank you for your support of the Utah NETS Program.

## Transportation Department to Change Crash-Test System



New vehicles in coming years will be subject to new, more stringent crash tests under the Department of Transportation's New Car Assessment Program. The department is updating its policies and procedures for tests in the nearly 30-year-old program, which assigns vehicles with one-to-five star safety

ratings.

Transportation Secretary Mary Peters recently announced the changes at the North American International Auto Show in Detroit. According to Peters, the new tests may include ratings for crash avoidance systems such as electronic stability control, adaptive cruise control and lane departure warning systems. These systems are becoming more common on passenger vehicles in the United States. The systems either warn drivers of an imminent crash risk or automatically take corrective action to prevent a crash.

"Safety is not a static concept. Our approach to constantly improving vehicle safety can't be either. Every day, we're working hard to raise the bar on auto safety," Peters said. "We can never become complacent about saving the lives of our loved ones and we must be willing to evolve along with the times and technology," she added.

NHTSA, which is part of the Transportation Department, conducts the crash and rollover tests annually and rates cars and trucks based on their

performance. A five-star rating is the highest mark. According to NHTSA, the agency would make specific changes to the program only if reliable data shows the change would significantly improve vehicle safety. The agency said it would take these factors into account while reviewing the program:

- ◆Advances in test devices
- ◆Changing crash dynamics to reflect new vehicle design
- ◆New federal requirements that safety ratings be included on vehicle price stickers, effective Sept. 1, 2007
- ◆New vehicle technologies that have the potential to prevent crashes

In addition, the test procedures will be updated to reflect amendments in Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards 208, "Occupant Crash Protection," and 214 "Side Impact Protection." The amendments affect the design of crash test dummies, the speed at which the tests are conducted and the ways researchers analyze different types of injuries. The agency will phase in these changes between Sept. 1, 2007 and Sept. 1, 2011.

Currently, 95 percent of new cars earn top ratings in crash tests, according to NHTSA. A 2005 Government Accountability Office report cited this abundance of high ratings as an indication that the tests were losing their relevance and recommended the tests be altered to reflect changes in vehicle design.

Source: Traffic Safety March 2007





## In This Issue:

- ◆ **Distractions: Dangerous for Drivers**
- ◆ **10 Things You Need To Know About Commercial Vehicle Brakes**
- ◆ **The Speed Factor**
- ◆ **New Coordinator**
- ◆ **Transportation Department to Change Crash-Test System**



1574 West 1700 South, Suite 2A  
Salt Lake City, UT 84104

**ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED**

## NETS NEWS

If you would like to submit items for use in the newsletter, send them to:

### Utah NETS

1574 West 1700 South, Suite 2A  
Salt Lake City, UT 84104

**Phone:** (801) 478-7878

**Toll Free:** (800) 933-5943

**Fax:** (801) 478-0884

**E-Mail:** [safety@utahsafetycouncil.org](mailto:safety@utahsafetycouncil.org)

**Web Site:** [www.utahsafetycouncil.org](http://www.utahsafetycouncil.org)

To find out how NETS can help your business, call (801) 478-7878 ext 303 or (800) 933-5943 ext 303. Membership is free so sign up today!

Non-Profit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
Paid  
S.L.C., UT  
Permit No. 4978