

Texting increases crash risk 23 times: study

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A woman dials a cell phone in her car in 2003. Talking on a cell phone while driving increases the risk of a crash but not nearly as much as text messaging while behind the wheel, according to a report released on Tuesday.

Text messaging behind the wheel increases the risk of a crash or a near crash by 23 times, and is far more dangerous than talking on a cell phone while driving, according to a report released Tuesday.

The study by the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute (VTTI) said while talking on a phone did not cause drivers to take their eyes off the road, use of a keypad distracted motorists with disastrous consequences.

"Text messaging on a cell phone was associated with the highest risk of all cell phone related tasks," the VTTI said. "The tasks that draw the driver's eyes away from the forward roadway were those with the highest risk."

Studies conducted by the VTTI found that text messaging resulted in

the longest duration of "eyes off road time" -- 4.6 seconds over a six-second interval.

"This equates to a driver traveling the length of a football field (100 yards/meters) at 55 miles per hour (88.5 kilometers per hour) without looking at the roadway," it said.

"Talking/listening to a cell phone allowed drivers to maintain eyes on the road and were not associated with an increased safety risk to nearly the same degree," it said.

The study found that the risk of a crash or a near crash in a light vehicle or car while dialing on a [cell phone](#) was 2.8 times higher than non-distracted driving.

It was 1.3 times higher when it came to talking or listening on a cell phone, and 1.4 times higher when reaching for an object such as an electronic device.

In heavy vehicles or trucks, the risk of a crash or near crash was 5.9 times higher when dialing a cell phone, 1.0 times higher while talking or listening on a cell phone and 6.7 times higher when reaching for a device.

For truck drivers, the risk of a crash or near crash was 23.2 times higher while [texting](#) than for non-distracted driving, a figure considered equivalent for other drivers.

For the report, the VTTI used cameras and instrumentation to observe light vehicle and truck drivers involved in more than six million miles (nearly 10 million kilometers) of driving.

"These results show conclusively that a real key to significantly improving safety is keeping your eyes on the road," the VTTI said.

It recommended that "texting and dialing, should always be avoided" and called for text messaging to be banned in moving vehicles for all drivers.

According to The New York Times, texting while driving is banned in 14 of the 50 US states.

The Times reported last week that the federal agency tasked with keeping US roadways safe suppressed research seven years ago on the dangers of cell phone use while driving, fearing political fallout from the study.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration opted against making public data it had compiled on the dangers of "multi-tasking" behind the wheel because of concerns about angering members of Congress, the daily said.

The NHTSA research, which tracked cell phone use by US [drivers](#) in 2002, found that 955 people were killed during 240,000 roadway accidents while speaking or texting on a cell phone.

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