

Distracted driving data and laws to prevent it don't match up

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Cell phone distractions account for more than 300,000 car crashes each year. As a result, most states have put laws in place to limit or prohibit the use of mobile devices while driving. But a new study led by Temple University finds a widening gap between the evidence on distracted driving and the laws being passed to address the problem.

The new study, published this month in the [American Journal of Preventive Medicine](#), is the first comprehensive collection and coding of [state laws](#) attempting to address the [public health risk](#) posed by distracted driving.

Lead author Jennifer Ibrahim and her team analyzed distracted driving laws passed between January 1, 1992 and November 1, 2010, and found that laws varied from state to state based on type of mobile device (cell phones, laptops, [tablet computers](#)), categories of drivers (by age or by driving permit type), and types or locations of mobile device use.

Enforcement and penalties also varied from state to state; as of November 2010, 39 states plus Washington DC had one or more laws restricting use of mobile devices while driving; 11 states had no laws; and no state outlawed the use of cell phones completely.

The researchers say that there is no systematic review currently in place to evaluate distracted driving laws or provide evidence on their effectiveness, but that from a research standpoint, the variation is helpful – they are able to compare legislation from state to state to

identify for future research what provisions within a given law make it particularly effective.

"We know that distracted driving is dangerous, yet despite the diffusion of distracted driving laws, there is evidence that driver use of [mobile devices](#) is increasing," said Ibrahim, an assistant professor of public health in the College of Health Professions and Social Work. "Our study is the first step toward understanding which laws really do reduce distracted driving, and thus can reduce related crashes and associated injuries and fatalities."

Provided by Temple University

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