

CQ Researcher examines distracted driving

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More than 5,000 people die each year in vehicle crashes caused by distracted driving, many who were texting and talking on cellphones behind the wheel, according to the May 4 issue of *CQ Researcher* (published by CQ Press, an imprint of SAGE). Teen drivers appear to be especially susceptible to distraction.

The [National Highway Traffic Safety Administration](#) estimated that 16 percent of all drivers younger than 20 involved in [fatal crashes](#) were believed to be distracted – "the highest proportion of any age group," according to David Hosansky, author of the report, "Distracted Driving: Should driver texting and [cellphone](#) use be banned?".

Texting while driving is particularly perilous. A 2009 study focusing on drivers of larger vehicles and trucks concluded that texting raised the risk of a crash by 23 times compared with non-distracted driving. "Shockingly," Hosansky writes, "texting drivers took their eyes off the road for each text an average of 4.6 seconds – which at 55 mph, means they were driving the length of a football field without looking."

Talking on a cellphone is also dangerous. "Experts ... say that talking on a cellphone while driving is far more distracting than talking with an adult passenger because it consumes additional cognitive resources, including creating a mental picture of the person on the other end of the conversation," according to Hosansky. "Although some people may think they can safely talk and drive, researchers who observe people in driving simulators as well as in actual cars on the road find that a cellphone conversation will invariably intrude on a driver's attentiveness."

A 2011 Harris poll found that 59 percent of adult drivers admitted to talking on a hand-held cellphone while behind the wheel, and 37 percent said they engaged in texting.

Ten states and the District of Columbia have banned hand-held phone use by all drivers, and other states prohibit cellphone use by younger drivers and school bus [drivers](#). Yet, as Hosansky writes, "the distractions don't stop with cellphones. Carmakers are adding new technologies to the dashboard, such as Web browsers and GPS units. Carmakers say that such technologies are designed very carefully for safety, but safety advocates worry that they are creating even more hazardous driving conditions."

More information: To read more about this CQ Researcher report, visit library.cqpress.com/cqresearcher/

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