

Smartphone apps can help texting-while-driving addicts

25 November 2012, by Deborah Netburn

Texting n drivng? It's against the law in 39 states, but that hasn't stopped many of us from reaching for the phone while we're on the road. The chime of a new text message is enticing, and the urge to look at it is almost Pavlovian.

The good news is that if you can't keep yourself from reading and [sending text messages](#) while [driving](#), a host of smartphone applications can help you break the dangerous habit.

One of the most appealing of these apps is DriveMode, a free download from AT&T, which limits the phone's functionality while you're driving.

When DriveMode is activated it will automatically silence the notification sounds of incoming texts, emails and even your phone calls. It'll also send an automatic reply to the sender or caller that you're driving and can't respond.

You still can receive and make calls for a list of up to five people if you absolutely need to hear from them. But no texts are allowed.

The app is available only for AT&T subscribers and only for Android and BlackBerry smartphones. A spokeswoman for the company said the company is working on an iPhone app, but no release date is scheduled.

Sprint, Verizon and T-Mobile make similar apps, although they are not all free.

If you think it is essential to get and respond to text messages while driving, consider using a service that will read your text messages to you and allow you to respond by talking. If you have the iPhone 5 or 4S, you can get voice assistant Siri to help you out. When you get a new [text message](#), you can simply ask Siri to read it to you. After she's read it, you can tell her you'd like to respond and she'll take down your message and send it. Google Voice Actions provides a similar service for

Android users.

If you have an earlier iPhone or a BlackBerry, you can download the Drive Safe app, which provides a similar service.

There are also apps to help parents of teen drivers, who are more likely to text and drive than any other age group.

A recent survey by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration found that drivers 18 to 20 years old are three times more likely to text and drive than those over 25. And a survey sponsored by AT&T found that 43 percent of teenagers said they have texted while driving.

If you are the parent of a teenage driver, consider downloading the DriveScribe app, available in Google Play and Apple's App Store, to your child's smartphone.

The free app uses a jamming function to block all texts and calls when it is switched to "driver mode." It also keeps drivers apprised of speed limits and upcoming stop signs, and will even tell a driver to slow down if the car is moving too fast. Paranoid parents can even get text or email alerts when the app detects the vehicle is going faster than the speed limit.

As an incentive for teens to activate the app - rather than being told by their parents - the [app](#) developer created a scoring system in which drivers are awarded points and gift cards for safe driving.

But keep in mind that it's not just kids who are texting and driving - the AT&T survey found that 41 percent of teens say they've seen their parents text and drive too.

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APA citation: Smartphone apps can help texting-while-driving addicts (2012, November 25) retrieved 3 December 2020 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-11-smartphone-apps-texting-while-driving-addicts.html>

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