

## Limiting Behind-the-Wheel Distractions

Today's drivers are constantly bombarded with distractions both inside and outside the car, but auto safety analysts warn that too many distractions can greatly increase a driver's chances of being involved in a traffic accident.

"Driving is one of the most demanding tasks we undertake. It's a full-time job, yet a lot of drivers treat it as a secondary activity," says Buzz Rodland, Immediate Past Chair of the American International Automobile Dealers Association. "Any activity that takes a driver's focus off of driving – even for only a second or two – carries tremendous potential risks."

Some of the most common driver distractions include:

- Looking at billboards, accidents or other events on the roadway
- Personal maintenance (i.e. shaving, applying makeup, combing hair)
- Adjusting the radio or other vehicle controls
- Carrying out conversations with other passengers and attending to small children and pets
- Reading
- Eating and drinking
- Talking on a cell phone

According to research conducted by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), an estimated 25 percent of the 6.3 million automobile crashes reported each year involve some

form of driver distraction. The Department of Transportation (DOT) estimates that 6.5 percent of all crash fatalities in 2002 were the result of distracted drivers.

Automakers are continually designing new technologies tailored to minimize driver distraction. But even with advances like voice commands, steering-wheel mounted controls and lane-changing alerts, nothing can take the place of driver attentiveness.

Some states have begun cracking down on driver distractions. For example, New Hampshire has a comprehensive distracted driving law on the books. And a number of states, including the District of Columbia, impose hefty fines on motorists caught using cell phones without a hands-free device.

"For drivers who absolutely must conduct business while driving, there are steps that can be taken to help minimize distractions,"

added Rodland. "Most auto dealerships offer hands-free cell phone kits that can help reduce some of the potential risks involved in operating a cell phone while driving."

Analysts with the Governors Highway Safety Association (GHSA) argue, however, that part of the challenge of reducing driving distractions is in

determining the scope of the problem. GHSA, NHTSA and other federal auto safety agencies recommend that states now track whether or not driver distractions contributed to crashes.

For more information on potential driving distractions or ways to limit behind-the-wheel distractions, visit:

[www.aiada.org/limitdistractions](http://www.aiada.org/limitdistractions)

