



What Have You Done to Save a Life Today?



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Distracted Driving = Dumb

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How many things can you do behind the wheel? How about having lunch — juggling your cheeseburger and soda while trying to keep one hand, or maybe an elbow, on the wheel? Of course, you can always catch up on that last-minute grooming — combing your hair, shaving, putting on your eyeliner or lipstick. And then, of course, there's keeping up with friends on your cell phone or by texting. Why waste all that time just driving when you're going down the road? Think of how much else you could get done!

Of course, the whole world isn't just one big road with you being the only driver. If it were, maybe it wouldn't matter if you drove distracted. But, unfortunately, it doesn't work that way as a 19-year-old girl on her cell phone and an Army family found out in October 2007. The girl was talking to her mom when she lost control of her car, veered across a highway median and slammed head-on into a family headed home after church. The girl's conversation with her mother was cut short — permanently. The Soldier and his two children were taken to a local hospital. However, he lost much more than just seven workdays as he recovered in the hospital — he also lost his wife. One cell phone call tragically changed two families forever.

Although people often associate cell phones with distracted driving, there are a multitude of other things you can do behind the wheel that can land you in trouble. Adjusting your seat, mirrors, temperature, radio, global positioning system, CD player, along with ‘dashboard dining,’ ‘highway hygiene’ and “gratuitous gawking” can all send you on a painful detour en route your destination. According to the National Safety Council, 28 percent of all traffic crashes --or 1.6 million per year are caused by cell phone or texting distracted drivers.

To avoid an expensive stopover in the hospital or a permanent layover in the morgue, the NSC offers the following tips:

- Put your cell phone on silent or vibrate before starting the car.
- Modify your voicemail greeting to indicate you are unavailable to answer calls or return messages while driving.
- Inform clients, associates and business partners why calls may not be returned immediately.
- If you need to talk or text, pull over to a safe location and park your vehicle.

If you’re on an Army installation, using your cell phone while driving is a definite no-no. Unless you are using a hands-free device, you are required to pull over and park safely before using your cell phone. In addition, portable headphones, earphones or other listening devices are prohibited while driving as they can keep you from recognizing emergency signals, alarms, announcements, the approach of vehicles and human speech (how many times has a passenger warned you of an unseen danger?).

The bottom line is driving is a mind and body experience requiring your attention and ability to quickly react to unexpected situations. Make the mistake of dividing those skills behind the wheel and you may end up being “chauffeured” in a vehicle you never wanted to ride in.

For more information on distracted driving, visit the U.S. government’s official website at www.distraction.gov.



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