

# Risk Insights

Understanding and Preventing  
Distracted Driving



## Understanding and Preventing Distracted Driving

In today's fast-paced world, the prevalence of distractions on the road has become a critical concern, especially for businesses with commercial fleets. Distracted driving poses significant risks not only to drivers themselves but also to others sharing the road. For businesses that rely on vehicles for essential tasks, understanding and mitigating the dangers of distracted driving is crucial. This article reviews the different types of distracted driving and provides some solutions to help businesses prevent distracted driving from being an issue within their fleets.

*“prevent  
distracted driving  
from being an  
issue within your  
fleets”*

# Types of Distracted Driving



Distracted driving refers to any activity that diverts a driver's attention away from the primary task of operating their vehicle. While most people associate distracted driving with cellphone use, it encompasses a much wider range of behaviors. Specifically, distracted driving may stem from the following types of distractions:

- **Visual**—These types of distractions are those that take a driver's eyes off the road.
- **Physical**—Such distractions cause a driver to take their hands off the wheel of their vehicle.
- **Cognitive**—These types of distractions involve a driver thinking about or mentally focusing on something other than operating their vehicle.
- **Auditory**—Such distractions consist of any audible elements that divert a driver's attention away from the road, including loud music and conversations.



## VISUAL DISTRACTIONS

Distractions that take a driver's eyes off the road pose a significant risk of accidents. Here are some common visual distractions:

- **In-vehicle technology**—Many modern vehicles are equipped with advanced technology, including navigation systems, communication devices and safety alert solutions. While these features aim to protect drivers, they can also be distracting. After all, every notification from this technology may demand a driver's visual attention.
- **Text messages**—Among the most perilous visual distractions is texting behind the wheel. Reading or sending a text message requires a driver to look away from the road for an extended period, thus substantially increasing the likelihood of accidents.
- **Passengers**—Having a passenger in the vehicle can be a major visual distraction, particularly when the driver is looking at this individual amid conversation.
- **External events**—Distractions such as visually observing accidents or construction sites can easily divert a driver's focus from the road ahead.



## PHYSICAL DISTRACTIONS

Activities that involve taking one or both hands off the wheel hinder a driver's ability to control their vehicle effectively. Common physical distractions include the following:

- **Mobile devices**—Holding a cellphone to make calls and send texts or using mobile applications that require at least one hand can minimize a driver's ability to operate their vehicle safely.
- **Food and beverages**—Eating or drinking behind the wheel can pose physical distractions that compromise safe driving. These activities typically lead to one-handed driving and may lead to spills, thus causing additional distractions. As such, eating and drinking diminishes a driver's capacity to react promptly to road hazards.
- **Other manual activities**—A driver may remove at least one hand from the wheel for various reasons, such as changing the radio station, adjusting their mirrors, regulating the temperature controls, reaching into the passenger seat or back seat and updating the navigation system. All of these activities can cause physical distractions and lead to accidents.



## AUDITORY DISTRACTIONS

While auditory distractions may appear less impactful, they can still significantly affect driving performance. Here are some common examples of these distractions:

- **In-vehicle alerts**—Auditory alerts from navigation systems, collision avoidance solutions or other types of vehicle technology can be distracting to a driver, especially when these alerts are loud, startling or frequent.
- **Communication devices**—Using a radio, cellphone or hands-free device for communication behind the wheel can divert a driver's attention from the road. Although hands-free calls are visually and manually less distracting, they still shift the driver's focus from the road to the conversation.





## COGNITIVE DISTRACTIONS

Cognitive distractions may not divert a driver's eyes from the road, but these distractions can hinder their ability to concentrate on operating their vehicle safely. Even without visual or physical distractions, cognitive distractions can impair a driver's reaction time and decision-making skills. Examples of these distractions include the following:

- **Daydreams**—Allowing the mind to wander or engaging in deep thought while driving can result in lapses in a driver's attention and delayed reactions to potential road hazards.
- **Fatigue and stress**—Prolonged hours on the road, tight schedules and the stress associated with commercial driving can deplete a driver's focus behind the wheel.
- **Conversations**—Other passengers can be cognitively distracting to a driver, especially when they are engaging in complex or emotionally charged discussions.
- **Mental health concerns**—Driving while mentally distracted can be unsafe as well. Not having a clear mind while operating a vehicle takes away a driver's full attention from the road.

## SOLUTIONS

Businesses should take a holistic approach to address distracted driving. First and foremost, employees should be trained on the dos and don'ts of safe driving. Drivers should also be made aware of their company policies and procedures related to the operation of commercial vehicles. They should be trained to pull over to eat, make phone calls or engage in any other potentially distracting activities. Vehicles should be set up to drivers' preferences prior to being taken on the road. Combating visual distractions demands proactive measures, including minimizing cellphone use; pre-setting navigation systems; and fostering a culture of attentive driving through education and enforcement of company policies and applicable federal, state and local laws. Technological innovations such as hands-free communication and simplified interfaces on vehicle systems can also help tackle visual distractions, allowing drivers to stay connected and informed without diverting their gaze from the road.

Concurrently, ergonomic interior design principles may assist with minimizing physical distractions by placing vehicle controls within easy reach and reducing the need for drivers to take their hands off the wheel. On the other hand, mitigating auditory distractions can be achieved by ensuring drivers keep conversations behind the wheel to a minimum and limiting the volume of in-vehicle alerts, communication systems and radios to avoid excessive noise. Additionally, cognitive distractions can be addressed through driver education programs that highlight mindfulness tactics and stress management techniques.





## CONCLUSION

Distracted driving poses substantial risks for businesses and their commercial fleets. Fortunately, understanding the different types of distracted driving and implementing integrated solutions that foster a culture of attentiveness on the road can help businesses effectively combat these concerns. Contact us today for more information on preventing distracted driving.

 **contact us**  
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