

Electronic Newsletter

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Our View: Even Hands-Free Phones are Dangerous While Driving



The Norwich Bulletin printed, as Guest Commentary, [Atty. Scott Camassar's letter to the editor concerning distracted driving](#). He wrote:

This problem continues to grow despite increased efforts to raise awareness of the causes and consequences, and everyone is at risk, young drivers in particular.

According to the National Safety Council (NSC), driving while talking on cell phones, even hands-free, is four times more likely to result in a crash with injuries. The NSC's 2010 white paper called "Understanding the Distracted Brain: Why driving while using hands-free cell phones is risky behavior" (available at www.KidsAgainstDistractedDriving.com) should be required reading for all middle- and high school students. The NSC compiled over 30 studies from around the world, all comparing driver performance with handheld and hands-free phones. All of these studies showed that hands-free phones offered no safety benefit when driving, because the cognitive distraction caused by paying attention to a phone conversation contributes to numerous driving impairments. Taking your mind off the road is just as dangerous as taking your eyes off the road.

All of the tasks needed for driving-cognitive, visual, auditory, and manual-are controlled by the brain. Studies show that the same area of the brain used for conversation is also used for driving tasks. In fact, listening and language comprehension actually draw cognitive resources away from driving.

The brain does not perform multiple tasks at the same time, but rather in sequence, switching between tasks. Studies show that the brain engages in a constant six-step process to deal with new information: 1. Select the information it will attend to; 2. Process it; 3. Encode it (creating memory); and 4. Store the information. Before the brain can act on saved information, it still must: 5. Retrieve stored information; and 6. Act on it. All of these steps take time and all are affected when the brain becomes overloaded with new information. The brain must screen out information in order to handle distraction overload, but people cannot control the information that gets processed and what gets filtered out.

In addition, the brain also alternates focus and attention. Driving and using a phone are both complex cognitive tasks, requiring the brain to shift focus, which results in some important information going unprocessed by the brain. The result can be "inattention blindness" and longer reaction time, both of which negatively affect driving performance.

"Inattention blindness" is shocking. Research shows that distracted drivers using cell phones look at, but fail to see, up to 50 percent of the information in their driving environment, meaning they do not process important information needed to respond effectively to driving hazards. When a driver fails to appreciate things in the roadway environment, or notices them too late, it is impossible to safely respond in order to avoid a crash.

A survey by Seventeen magazine and AAA found that "Nearly nine in 10 teenage drivers have engaged in distracted-driving behaviors such as texting or talking on a cell phone although most of them know that their actions increase their risk of crashing." But distracted driving is not just a teen problem. A Pew Research study showed that "adults text as often while driving

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Number, Size of Malpractice Payments Decline

[Medscape](#) reported that for the eighth consecutive year, the "number and total value of malpractice payments made on behalf of physicians declined in 2011," according to Public Citizen. Utilizing data from the National Practitioner Data Bank, the study found that in 2011 there were 9,758 payments, "the lowest since the NPDB began tracking them in 1991." The peak year was 2001, when 16,565 payments were reported. The study also found that the average payment in 2011 was \$327,561, "the lowest amount since 2000 after adjustment for inflation."

CPSC Chair says U.S. Making Strides in Childrens' Product Safety

US Consumer Product Safety Commission Chairwoman Inez Tenenbaum recently stated, "Today, thanks to the Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act of 2008 (CPSIA), the United States can proudly claim to be a global leader in children's product safety. ... Our nation now has the strongest crib safety standards in the world, along with mandatory standards for play yards, toddler beds, baby bath seats and baby walkers. ... So long as I am chairwoman, CPSC will continue to move forward, do what is in the best interest of our nation's children and uphold our mission to save lives and reduce injuries." Read [more](#).

as teenagers and are actually more likely than teens to talk on the phone when behind the wheel." Distracted driving is everyone's problem. Make a pledge to be part of the solution.

Survey: Drivers Want Backup Cameras, Warning Systems

USA Today reported that consumer interest is growing in safety features such as backup cameras, blind-spot warning systems and pedestrian alerts, according to a survey released by Harris Interactive. Traditionally, fewer people care about safety compared to other factors like gas mileage and quality, but cars are becoming safer by the year and features like backup cameras may be used more often by drivers, even several times in a single commute. Read [more](#).

July 4th: Deadliest Day on the Road, Especially for Teens

Summer is supposed to be a time of celebration for teens and their families with prom, graduation and college on the horizon. Unfortunately, a recent analysis of crash data from the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) shows that July 4 is the deadliest day for teens on the road and is just as deadly for the motorists that will be driving alongside them. Nationally, car crashes are the number one cause of death for everyone ages 1-34, with teens crashing four times more often than any other age group. Based on the latest available data, IIHS reports that more than 800 people were killed on July 4 from 2006-2010. Read [more](#).

Poll: 4 in 5 Drivers Distracted

A new Harris Poll reveals that more than four out of five motorists admit to making some sort of distracted driving behavior in a typical month. Men, it turns out, are more likely to engage in this potentially dangerous behavior, according to the latest Harris AutoTechCast study, particularly when it comes to taking or making a phone call. Younger motorists are more likely to do things like texting. Some of the behaviors might not normally land on a list of dangerous activities, such as drinking a beverage, but the risky behaviors begin to add up - to an average of 37 different distracted driving activities over the last month, according to Harris Interactive, which conducted the poll. Read [more](#).



America's tall ship, the Eagle, sails into New London harbor for OpSail 2012. Photo courtesy of Beth Camassar.

About Our Firm



At [The Law Firm of Stephen M. Reck](#), justice is our mission. Our firm is well known and well respected for its ability to handle personal injury, wrongful

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Recall Central

To read about recent recalls and product safety news from the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, click [here](#).

Get the latest recall information from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration [here](#).

The Dept. of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service regulate meat, poultry products and processed eggs. Check their recalls [here](#).

Click [here](#) for Food and Drug Administration recalls, market withdrawals and safety alerts.

For updates on the peanut products recall click [here](#).

Don't Drive Distracted!

It Kills



KidsAgainstDistractedDriving.com

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The trial attorneys at The Law Firm of Stephen M. Reck, LLC represent individuals in all types of personal injury cases throughout the state of Connecticut and the state of Rhode Island, including, in Connecticut: New London County, New Haven County, Middlesex County, Hartford County, Tolland County, and Windham County; and in Rhode Island: Bristol County, Kent County, Newport County, Providence County, and Washington County.

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