



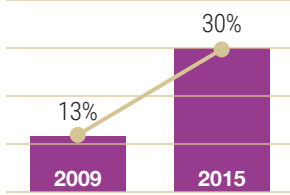
NTSB 2017-2018  
**MOST WANTED LIST** OF  
 TRANSPORTATION SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS

**Eliminate Distractions**



**HIGHWAY**

**MWL**  
 MOST WANTED LIST



Percent of drivers who admitted to surfing the Web while driving  
 (Source: State Farm)

**What is the issue?**

**D**istracted driving is a growing and life-threatening problem in all modes of transportation. To reduce crashes, injuries, and deaths, drivers and other operators must completely disconnect from an increasing variety of deadly distractions, whether they be visual, manual, cognitive, or auditory. We know that focusing on or thinking about anything other than the task at hand impairs performance and can lead to tragic consequences.

Increased use of portable electronic devices (PEDs) among the public has made distractions even more prevalent. Since 2003, we have found distraction stemming from PEDs to be a cause or contributing factor in several highway crashes. Given the accelerating frequency of these accidents, and the trends and dangerous habits we've discovered in many crashes since 2002, we issued our boldest recommendation yet in December of 2011, calling for a nationwide ban on the use of PEDs while driving. Whereas previous recommendations addressed specific populations, our 2011 recommendation applied to all drivers.

We remain very concerned about the growing number of highway crashes that involve driver distraction, particularly by PEDs, which is why we've kept this issue on our Most Wanted List for the past 4 years. More than 35,000 people were killed on the nation's highways in 2015, and it is estimated that about 1 in 10 of those deaths occurred in a crash involving distracted driving. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reports that fatalities in distraction-affected crashes increased by 8.8 percent from 2014 to 2015.

The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety reports that cognitive distraction is roughly equal whether a driver is using a hands-free or handheld cell phone. In 2013, the foundation reported that more than two in three drivers said that they talked on a cell phone while driving within the past 30 days, more than one in three drivers admitted to reading a text message or e-mail while driving, and more than one in four drivers admitted to typing or sending a text or e-mail. A 2015 report by State Farm revealed a new staggering trend: nearly 30 percent of drivers surveyed admitted to accessing the Internet while driving. That compares to just 13 percent who admitted to surfing the Web while driving in 2009.





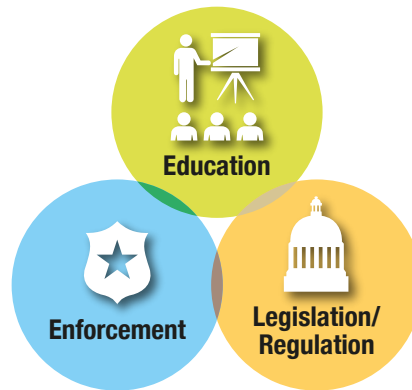
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The problem of distracted driving is real and life threatening. Driving that is distracted by any wireless device use is a serious safety risk, and not just for distracted drivers, but for everyone on the road. Although drivers contend with many other distractions, electronic communication devices are particularly concerning because drivers spend more time on these devices than on other distracting activities. We anticipate that distracted driving will continue to be a significant problem until regulators, industry, and the public embrace distraction-free transportation.

## What can be done?

To reduce crashes, injuries, and deaths, drivers must completely disconnect from an increasing variety of deadly distractions; every auxiliary task impairs our ability to process the primary task at hand. We realize, however, that it will take a cultural change for drivers to understand that their safety depends on disconnecting from distractions. If real change is to happen, it will require a three-pronged approach that includes strict laws, proper education, and effective enforcement. We have seen this approach work with use of seat belts, increased use of child restraints, and in curbing drunk and drugged driving. Public education continues to be important for teaching drivers, operators, and safety-critical personnel about the dangers of distractions. Legislation and enforcement can help bring about this change.

The majority of the public agrees that a ban is needed on the use of PEDs while driving. In June 2014, the National Safety Council reported that 73 percent of drivers think more enforcement of texting laws is needed. The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety reported that 85 percent of Americans think that other drivers who talk on cell phones are a threat to safety. However, only 14 states and the District of Columbia currently ban the use of handheld cell phones while driving. The District of Columbia and 37 states restrict the use of cell phones by novice drivers, and 44 states and the District of Columbia ban text messaging while driving. No states ban the use of hands-free devices. Arizona, Texas, Montana, and Missouri have yet to adopt a texting law—the first step toward eliminating deadly distractions. We are calling on those states to take action. We believe a significant number of lives can be saved and injuries avoided if states continue to expand and strengthen their distracted driving laws.



**Real change will require a three-pronged approach that includes strict laws, proper education, and effective enforcement.**

Distraction is not just about holding a device in your hand or glancing away from the road; it is also about mentally straying from the driving task. Safe driving requires 100 percent of a driver's attention 100 percent of the time; however, many drivers wrongfully think multitasking while driving is acceptable. Research, statistics, and lives lost show that even the momentary diversion—such as reading a text message or talking on a wireless phone—of a driver's attention from the driving task can have catastrophic consequences. Ultimately, eliminating distractions in transportation will require changes in regulations and in driver/operator thinking and behavior. Our continued focus on distraction as a Most Wanted List issue will hasten necessary changes. ■

The NTSB Most Wanted List highlights safety issues identified from the NTSB's accident investigations to increase awareness about the issues and promote recommended safety solutions.

The NTSB is an independent federal agency charged by Congress with investigating every civil aviation accident in the United States and significant accidents in other modes of transportation – railroad, highway, marine and pipeline. The NTSB determines the probable cause of the accidents and issues safety recommendations aimed at preventing future accidents. In addition, the NTSB carries out special studies concerning transportation safety and coordinates the resources of the federal government and other organizations to provide assistance to victims and their family members impacted by major transportation disasters.

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### Related Accidents\*

Date	Location	Accident ID
<a href="#">May 23, 2013</a>	<a href="#">Mount Vernon, WA</a>	<a href="#">HWY13MH012</a>
<a href="#">May 28, 2013</a>	<a href="#">Rosedale, MD</a>	<a href="#">HWY13MH013</a>
<a href="#">August 5, 2010</a>	<a href="#">Gray Summit, MO</a>	<a href="#">HWY10MH018</a>

\*For detailed accident reports visit [www.nts.gov](http://www.nts.gov)

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**Critical changes needed to reduce transportation accidents and save lives.**

