

**WIRELESS COMMUNICATION DEVICES  
TALKING POINTS  
JULY 2003**

**Background:** The wireless industry has grown at an extraordinary rate. Today there are over 147 million cell phone users – more than half of the U.S. population. According to a NHTSA survey, 6% of daylight driving time – up from 4% in 2000 - involves talking on the phone. That translates into more than 200 million in-car calls daily.

- The primary responsibility of the driver at all times is to operate a motor vehicle safely. It is a task that requires full attention and focus.
- Statistics show that all distractions, whether associated with the use of technology or not, can increase the risk of a crash. NHTSA estimates that driver distraction contributes to about 25 percent of all traffic crashes.
- Though all distractions pose a potential safety risk, we have recently seen the growth of a particular distraction, namely cell phone use while driving.
- Though the precise impact cannot be quantified through traditional data collection processes, we nevertheless have concluded that the use of cell phones while driving has contributed to an increasing number of crashes, injuries and fatalities.
- A significant body of experimental research indicates that both hand-held and hands-free cell phones increase the risk of a crash. Indeed, there is little if any difference between hand-held and hands-free phones in contributing to the risk to themselves and others.
- Limiting use to hands-free phones while driving will not solve the problem. In either operational mode, we have found that the cognitive distraction is significant enough to degrade a drivers' performance. We therefore recommend that drivers not use wireless communication devices, including text messaging systems, when driving, except in an emergency.
- Moreover, legislation that only forbids the use of handheld cell phones while driving will not be effective since it will not address the problem. In fact, such legislation may erroneously imply that hands-free phones are safe.
- States should additionally consider the increased vulnerability of novice drivers as it relates to distractions, including cell phone use. Countermeasures, including education and restrictions on cell phone use by young drivers, are advised.
- Wireless communication devices are not the only driver distraction of concern to NHTSA. The agency will continue to study the range of distractions and will develop programs and partnerships as necessary to reduce those risks. The agency also will monitor the impact of driver adaptation to wireless communication devices.

- The agency also will continue to work with industry to make sure that wireless and other technologies will be developed to minimize driver distraction.

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