The Great Multitasking Lie

Denouncing the Myths of Cell Phone Distracted Driving

Most people may know that texting while driving is a dangerous behavior, but many don’t fully grasp the idea that having cell phone conversations in the car is also risky. Below, the National Safety Council helps debunk myths surrounding cell phone conversations and the myth that the public believes it is safe to use your cell phone while driving.

Consider This

It's no mystery: Americans today have an unhealthy obsession with their cell phones,

A 2013 survey conducted by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety found that more than two in three drivers report talking on their cell phones while driving at least once in the past 30 days.

Drivers talking on hand-held or hand-free cell phones are 4x as likely to be involved in a car crash.

The average cost of a property damage crash in 2011: $9,100

Nearly one in three say they did this "for safety" or "regularly.”

In addition, the National Safety Council currently estimates that people talking on cell phones while driving are involved in 21% of all traffic crashes in the United States.

According to a 2013 analysis.

Myth vs. Reality

Myth #1 Drivers can multitask.

Reality Contrary to popular belief, the human brain cannot multitask. Driving and talking on a cell phone are “two thinking modes” that involve many areas of the brain. Instead of integrating both simultaneously, the brain rapidly switches between the two cognitive activities. Take the classic example of the act of walking and chewing gum: There is a common misconception that because people appear to simultaneously do both, they can just as easily talk on their cell phones and drive safely at the same time. The myth is that walking and chewing gum involve a thinking task and a non-thinking task. The truth is that Conversation and driving are both thinking tasks.

Myth #2 Talking to someone on a cell phone is no different than talking to someone in the car.

Reality A 2013 study cited by the University of Utah found that drivers' eyelids closed for cell phone users are more oblivious to changing traffic conditions because they are involved in the conversation who are aware of the road.

In contrast, drivers with adult passengers in their cars have an extra set of eyes and ears to help keep the driver alert to oncoming traffic problems. Adult passengers also tend to adjust their talking when traffic is challenging. People on the other end of a driver’s cell phone cannot do that.

Myth #3 Hands-free devices eliminate the danger of cell phone use during driving.

Reality Whether hand-held or hands-free, cell phone conversations while driving are risky because the distraction to the brain remains.

Activity in the parietal lobe, the area of the brain that processes movement of visual images and is important for safe driving, decreases by as much as 37% when listening to language, according to a study by Carnegie Mellon University.

Myth #4 Drivers talking on cell phones still have a quicker reaction time than those who are driving under the influence.

Reality A controlled driving simulator study conducted by the University of Utah found that drivers using cell phones had slower reaction times than drivers with a .08 blood alcohol content, the legal intoxication limit.

Drivers talking on cell phones can miss seeing up to 50% of their driving environment, including signals and red lights. They look but they don’t see. This phenomenon is also known as the "inattention blindness." There is a simple solution: drivers talking on cell phones can immediately abide their risk by hanging up the phone, while drivers remain at risk until they walk away.

Sources: