

Every year thousands of people are killed in crashes involving distracted drivers. It is not uncommon to assume that a distracted driving campaign is only about the dangers of texting and driving. Texting and driving is considered one of the greatest distractions for drivers.

Data collected and analyzed for the Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS), and published by Erie Insurance, revealed that being “generally distracted” or “lost in thought” was the top distraction involved in fatal crashes – an overwhelming 61% of distracted drivers admitted to daydreaming when a collision happened.

Daydreaming while cursing on a highway at the posted speed can have tragic consequences. Distractions and shifting focus while behind the wheel at any speed has consequences. Recently, a woman was critically injured when a vehicle, while still in neutral as it exited a car wash, rolled into another vehicle and pinned her between both cars. It can be argued that the driver, who was in the vehicle at the time of the incident, wasn’t actually “driving,” While that may be true, a driver needs to be focused and alert at all times to help ensure the safe operation of a vehicle.

While cellphone usage – usually considered one of the top factors of distracted driving-related accidents – took second place on the list of top driving distractions, only 14% of drivers admitted to using their phones when tragedy struck. Drivers who are lost in thought are such a huge problem, that the percentage of distracted drivers who admitted they were daydreaming is easily double the combined percentage of the other distraction types listed by Erie. Here is the entire list:

1. Generally distracted or “lost in thought” (daydreaming) 61%
2. Cellphone use (talking, listening, dialing, texting) 14%
3. Outside person, object or event, such as rubbernecking 6%
4. Other occupants (talking with or looking at other people in car) 5%
5. Using or reaching for device brought into vehicle, such as navigational device, headphones 2%
6. Adjusting audio or climate controls 1%
7. Eating or drinking 1%
8. Using other device/controls integral to vehicle, such as adjusting rear view mirrors, seats, or using OEM navigation system 1%
9. Moving object in vehicle, such as pet or insect <1%
10. Smoking related (includes smoking, lighting up, putting ashes in ashtray)

So what can be done to help avoid the consequences of distracted driving? Here are AAA's Top 10 Tips to Avoid Distractions While Driving

- #1 Rule

if you cannot devote your full attention to driving because of some other activity, it's a distraction. Take care of it before or after your trip, not while behind the wheel.

- Fully focus on driving

Do not let anything divert your attention, actively scan the road, use your mirrors and watch out for pedestrians and cyclists.

- Store your stuff

Store loose gear, possessions and other distractions that could roll around in the car, so you do not feel tempted to reach for them on the floor or the seat.

- Adjust before you go

Make adjustments before you get underway. Address vehicle systems like your GPS, seats, mirrors, climate controls and sound systems before hitting the road. Decide on your route and check traffic conditions ahead of time.

- Dress before you drive

Finish dressing and personal grooming at home – before you get on the road.

- Eating lunch while driving could make you late for dinner

Snack smart. If possible, eat meals or snacks before or after your trip, not while driving. On the road, avoid messy foods that can be difficult to manage.

- Get the kids (and the pets) settled before you start driving

Secure children and pets before getting underway. If they need your attention, pull off the road safely to care for them. Reaching into the backseat can cause you to lose control of the vehicle.

- Turn it off

Put aside your electronic distractions. Don't use cell phones while driving – handheld or hands-free – except in absolute emergencies. Never use text messaging, email functions, video games or the internet with a wireless device, including those built into the vehicle, while driving.

- A good passenger is a driver's best friend

If you have passengers, enlist their help so you can focus safely on driving.

- Pull over first, then deal with the issue

If another activity demands your attention, instead of trying to attempt it while driving, pull off the road and stop your vehicle in a safe place. To avoid temptation, power down or stow devices before heading out.