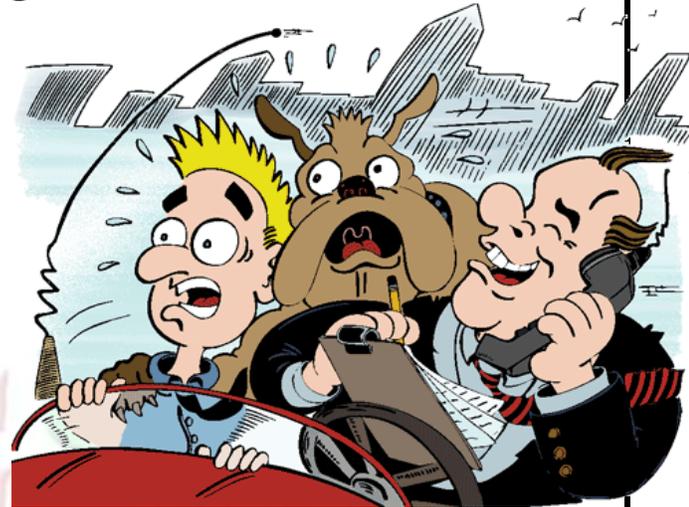


Cell Phones and Other Dangerous Distractions

Many of today's workplaces and households rely heavily on cellular telephones for quick and convenient communication. It seems that we want instantaneous contact. You hear it every day, "There's no way we can do business without cell phones." Chances are there is a cell phone in your life, used for communicating with the office while you are working in the field or with your children when they arrive home before you in the afternoon.

As good as cell phones might be for instant communication, they contribute to bad driving. Have you ever driven behind a slow vehicle, and then passed it only to see a cell phone conversation taking place? Minutes later the driver speeds past you because he just hung up? Aggravating isn't it? It's also dangerous. Talking on a cell phone distracts a driver from seeing hazards and responding quickly.

Drivers can't afford to be distracted by cell phones or anything else. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration in the United States says some form of driver distraction is a contributing factor in 20 to 30 per cent of vehicle crashes. The Network of Employers for Traffic Safety has studied data from the Department of Transportation and concluded that distracted driving contributed to as many as 4,000 traffic crashes a day.



Here are some reminders for driving safely without distractions:

- ◆ Make sure you, and the workers you supervise, use cell phones safely. The safest thing is to make your calls before you set out. If you receive a cell phone call while you are driving, let the caller leave a message, pull over, and call that person back. Reinforce this safety policy by issuing regular reminders and by setting a good example.
- ◆ Consider how your children might be observing your unsafe habits and thinking of them as something normal that everyone does. If you don't want your children jabbering away on cell phones while they are driving, don't let them see you doing it, ever.
- ◆ Be aware that using a hands-free, voice-activated cell phone can still distract you.
- ◆ A safe driver also stops before checking maps and addresses, looking at paperwork, and dealing with similar distractions.
- ◆ Arguments or stressful conversations with passengers can also divert the driver's attention from the road. We know better than to drive while under the influence of alcohol or drugs, but fatigue, stress and strong emotions such as anger can also impair the ability to drive safely.
- ◆ Fiddling with the radio or vehicle sound system, adjusting heaters, and digging items out of the glove box while driving can be even more distracting than cell phones and all have caused vehicle crashes.
- ◆ Even eating and drinking while driving can cause a crash.

So, think twice about those distractions while driving. Don't drive and talk on a cell phone. Enforce DoD's policy forbidding cell phone use on the road. Your life and the life of other drivers around you may just depend on it.

