

Driver distractions.

Driver distraction is a key contributory factor in Hit Third Party in Rear type accidents.

Are you aware that the effect of talking on a phone while driving has been shown to be worse than drinking alcohol: driver reaction times are 30% slower while using a hands-free phone than driving with a blood alcohol level of 80mg alcohol per 100ml blood (the current UK limit), and nearly 50% slower than driving under normal conditions¹.

Many drivers hugely underestimate the risks involved in dividing their attention and believe they are still in full control of the vehicle. However, research shows that 98% of people are not able to divide their attention without undergoing a significant deterioration in driving performance².

Distractions can arise from a vast array of sources. Objects, events or activities both inside and outside the vehicle can cause distraction³. When these distractions occur, it results in a lower standard of driving, slower reaction times, poor speed control and poor decision making.

There are four types of driver distractions:

- > **Visual** – where the driver sees objects or events which impairs the driver's observations of the road environment (e.g. sat nav, external distractions).
- > **Biomechanical** – doing something physical, not related to driving, (e.g. reaching, leaning, eating, drinking, manipulating vehicle controls etc).
- > **Auditory** – when sounds prevent drivers from making best use of their hearing (e.g. radio, external sounds, conversing).
- > **Cognitive** – when a driver is thinking about something not related to the primary task of driving the vehicle (e.g. use of mobile phone, recent emotional event etc). Lack of cognitive engagement means that drivers spend less time checking mirrors or looking for hazards.

Managing driver distractions

- > Take every opportunity to raise your awareness of driver distractions when your company provides education and training, whether on induction training or existing driver training programs (e.g. DCPC).
- > Use in-vehicle technology sensibly, particularly if your company operates several systems alongside one another: telematics (light bar and buzzer), cameras, hands-free mobile phones, PDA/ hand-held terminals.
- > Ensure you understand your company's mobile phone policy and only ever make/receive calls when you are safe and legal to speak.
- > It is estimated that up to 95% of crashes are down to driver error⁴. It is therefore vital that you understand the importance of safety and how you can protect yourself and others.

References:

1. Using a hands-free mobile whilst driving can be more dangerous than drink driving, Transport Research Laboratory, 2009.
2. Supertaskers: Profiles in extraordinary multitasking ability, University of Utah, 2010.
3. Driver distraction, RoSPA, 2007.
4. Dimensions of aberrant driver behaviour, Uppsala University, Sweden, 1998 (cited in Brake: Essential guide to fleet safety, 2014).

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