



EL PUENTE NEWS

Puerto Rico Transportation Technology Transfer Center / Puerto Rico LTAP



NATIONAL DISTRACTED DRIVING AWARENESS MONTH: DISTRACTIONS ARE NOT JUST TEXTING!



Did you know that the time reaction of a distracted driver and a drunk driver on the road are **equally as slow**? According to the Puerto Rico's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), you can increase a 75% chance of causing a car crash by texting and driving.

The month of April commemorates the National Distracted Driving Awareness Month, a time to consider how even the smallest distractions while driving can lead up to the effects of a major crash that could easily be avoided. Unfortunately, texting while driving is the most common type of distracted driving. Texting while driving is illegal in Puerto Rico, as in 49 States of the U.S. Handheld phone usage (for manual phone interactions such as calls and texts) while driving is also banned in Puerto Rico and 30 U.S. States. With the pressures of multitasking, it is easy to be tempted to use the phone while driving. Let's put into perspective each step that leads you to get distracted by your phone when driving:

- **Scene 1:** Your phone vibrates with a notification sound.
- **Scene 2:** The notification catches your attention, leading you to glance at your phone.
- **Scene 3:** You then reach for your phone and read the latest message(s) received.
- **Scene 4:** After reading the texts quickly, you start thinking about how you will respond to the text(s).
- **Scene 5:** You put the phone away, but you're left with the thoughts relating to the message(s).

It seems like a normal process, doesn't it? Multitasking is done on a daily basis and may feel harmless. However, each of these steps takes productive and valuable time away from focusing on the road. What seems like an insignificant distraction affects your ability to drive safely and can lead you to serious consequences behind the wheel.

REMEMBER: WHILE YOUR EYES ARE ON THE ROAD, EVERY SINGLE SECOND COUNTS!



There is no scientific definition behind distracted driving, whatever keeps your eyes off of the road is causing you a distraction. Texting and driving is not the only form of distraction off the road, though. According to the [Governors Highway Safety Association \(GHSA\)](#), distracted driving includes **self-grooming, eating, drinking, daydreaming,** and **talking with passengers.** This makes the essential task of safe driving to be at risk. And whatever leads you to have a distraction, it causes you to have your eyes and mind off the road.

The good news is that these potentially dangerous actions can be easily avoided. The distractions that lead you to lose focus can be completely avoided by having their root causes be identified and put into practice by being aware to identify in the daily lives of all individuals.

HOW DO I KNOW WHEN I BEGIN TO GET DISTRACTED FROM THE ROAD? TIPS TO PUT INTO PRACTICE FOR SELF-AWARENESS

Put this into perspective:

Reading a text message for just 5 seconds at 55 mph is equivalent to a driving distance of 400 feet, which is the equivalent size of a baseball park.



Distracted driving may occur differently among driver individuals, depending on the person's interests and priorities at the moment. This is also known as **inattention blindness**. Here are some main key point takeaways on how distractions begin:

1. **Having too much "mental noise"**. Whether you are thinking about an expected phone call, your state of hunger, or the chores you left undone back home, these thoughts can cause you to lose focus from the road.
 - **Solution: Always remind yourself of maintaining focus on the road to redirect your attention.**
2. **You begin to multitask**. Having someone on the speaker phone while listening to music and taking sips from your coffee cup are impulses that can cause you to be mindless of your hands off the steering wheel and concentration from the road.
 - **Solution: Make sure to complete pending tasks at home to avoid doing anything that takes your hands off the steering wheel and put away your electronic devices.**
3. **Difficulty maintaining a consistent speed**. Unstable speed or drifting unintentionally from lane to lane can signify losing focus, which can be highly dangerous.
 - **Solution: Concentrate on your senses by assuring the movements of your hands on the steering wheel and foot on the pedals are consistent.**
4. **Sleepiness or drowsiness**. Signs of yawning, heavy eyelids, tiredness cause your mind to become less alert to your surroundings.
 - **Solution: Take regular breaks to rest when you feel tired and prioritize healthy sleeping habits.**

This is also a reminder for civil engineering professionals of their duty to make roads safer by designing thoughtful projects that prioritize both driver and pedestrian safety, incorporate innovative technologies, and ensure accessibility for all individuals.

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