

Survey Results Reveal Distracted Driving Habits of San Diegans

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UC San Diego Researchers and CHP Educate Public on Driving Laws and Safety Tips

According to experts in the Training, Research and Education for Driving Safety (TREDS) program at the University of California, San Diego School of Medicine, there were approximately 3,300 deaths and 400,000 injuries nationwide in 2011 due to collisions involving distracted driving. The use of cell phones while operating a vehicle is currently the leading cause of driver distraction crashes in California. With April being national distracted driving awareness month, a team of researchers released survey results that reveal the habits of San Diego County drivers who use their cell phone while behind the wheel.

“Studies have shown that phoning and driving increases the risk of crashes four-fold, with hands-free and handheld devices equally dangerous; this is the same as driving with a blood alcohol content (BAC) at the legal limit of .08. Texting increases this risk eight to 16 times,” said Linda Hill, MD, MPH, clinical professor in the Department of Family and Preventive Medicine at UC San Diego School of Medicine. “A key initiative for the TREDS program and goal of the survey is to understand distracted driving behavior and work on strategies to improve road safety.”

According to the California Highway Patrol (CHP), cell phone use while driving is not the only issue.

“Anything from drinking coffee to managing children can take your mind off the road at a critical moment. Most drivers are distracted at one time or another. However, minimizing distractions in your own driving can prevent injury and save lives,” said John Antillon, CHP border division assistant chief.

The Adult Cell Phone Survey, conducted February 8, 2013 through March 31, 2013, focused on the driving habits of San Diego County residents, ages 30 to 64. The survey used an anonymous, online questionnaire to examine drivers’ attitudes about cell phone use and to quantify the amount of time that respondents use cell phones to text or call others while on the road. Overall, 715 participants completed the survey: 75 percent female, two thirds married, and the average age was 46-years-old.

The survey revealed:

- → Of the 512 respondents driving an average of one to two hours per day, the reported use of cell phones for talking, texting and other applications was: 30 percent ranged from sometimes to frequently, 53 percent rarely and 17 percent never.
- → 56 percent reported driving with a handheld phone and 92 percent drive with a hands-free phone.
- → Of the 261 respondents with children younger than 11-years-old in the car, 65 percent drive with a cell phone and 36 percent text.
Of the 193 respondents with children 12 to 17-years-old in the car, 63 percent use a phone while driving and 31 percent text.
- → Adults with children younger than 11-years-old in the car were significantly more likely to text and to talk on a handheld phone.
- → 31 percent of respondents feel obliged to take a work-related call while driving.

“In this study, we were looking for the distracted driving trends of adults with children and employees. The results highlight the dangerous behavior of adults driving distracted, especially with children in the car, exposing both themselves and their children to increased risk for a crash,” said Hill. “Moreover, employers should be aware that encouraging workers to initiate and receive calls while driving on the job is putting their employees at risk and exposing their companies to potential liability.”

“We know from prior research that parents are the number one source of information for teen drivers,” said Freddy Santos, corporate relations manager with Allstate. “When adults choose safe driving habits over distractions, it reinforces to teens, children and California’s new and future drivers the importance of driving safely.”

The survey was supported by a gift from Allstate Insurance Company.

The survey team, led by Hill, includes deputy director Jill Rybar, MPH, and PhD student Jessa Engelberg.

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