



National Telephone Survey on Distracted Driving Attitudes and Behaviors – 2012

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration conducted its second national survey of distracted driving to monitor the public’s attitudes, knowledge, and self-reported behavior about cell phones, texting, and driver choices. The first distracted driving survey was conducted in 2010. The 2012 survey was administered by telephone to 6,016 respondents 16 and older, with 3,872 interviews completed with respondents who were using landline phones and 2,144 interviews completed with respondents who were using cell phones. The survey over-sampled young adults 16 to 34. Interviewing was conducted from February to June 2012.

Changes Since 2010 Survey

Fewer respondents report answering or making cell phone calls while driving. People who always or almost always answered a call declined from 33% in 2010 to 28% in 2012. Making calls while driving is down from 10% in 2010 to 6% in 2012.

Meanwhile, the percentage of respondents who said they send text messages while driving increased from 12% in 2010 to 14% in 2012.

More respondents in 2012 reported they had decreased cell phone use while driving over the past 30 days than did respondents in 2010. In 2012, 19% reported that their frequency had decreased, while in 2010 about 12% reported a decrease. The most common reason for a decrease was safety awareness.

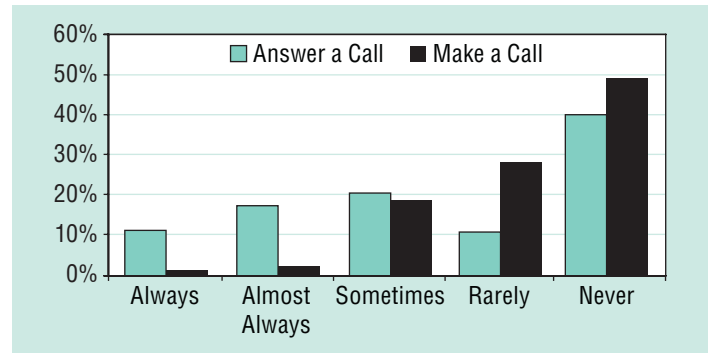
Support for laws banning handheld phone use while driving increased from 68% in 2010 to 74% in 2012. Support for laws banning texting remains high, at about 93% in 2012.

Talking on a Cell Phone While Driving

Among respondents, 11% report always and 17% report almost always answering their cell phones while driving (Figure 1). More than half (58%) of these drivers continue driving while completing their conversations, 17% inform the callers that they will call them back, 14% hand the phones to a passenger, and 11% pull over to a safe location

to continue the call. Forty percent of drivers report never answering their phones while driving.

Figure 1. Frequency of Answering and Making Calls While Driving



Of these same respondents, 2% are always, 3% are almost always, and 18% are sometimes willing to make calls. Forty-nine percent of drivers report never making calls while driving. Of those respondents who indicated that they make calls while driving, most use speed dial or their “favorites” to dial the phone numbers (53%) as opposed to dialing the 7- or 10-digit phone number.

Text Messaging and E-Mailing While Driving

One in 10 respondents (10%) report sending text messages or e-mails while driving at least sometimes, while 79% of respondents stated that they never do so. Of the drivers who report sending texts or e-mails, 44% state that they wait until they reach a stop light or stop sign to send the message, whereas 35% continue to drive while sending messages. Reading text messages or e-mails while driving was slightly more common than sending them, with 14% of respondents stating that they do so at least some of the time and 74% stating that they never do so.

Distraction-Prone versus Distraction-Averse Drivers

Cluster analysis was used to identify types of drivers based on responses to a series of 10 distracted driving questions. Two distinct clusters of drivers with similar overall behavioral tendencies were identified. One group

was composed of drivers who consistently reported engaging in distracted driving behaviors and one group was composed of drivers who reported distracted driving behaviors less often. Of those respondents categorized, 33% are distraction-prone drivers (n=1,989) and 67% are distraction-averse drivers (n=3,968).

Drivers classified as distraction-prone tended to be younger and more affluent, and have more formal education than those classified as distraction-averse. More than half of drivers 35 and younger were classified as distraction-prone, compared to 5 percent of drivers 65 or older. Over half of drivers with annual household incomes exceeding \$100,000 were classified as distraction-prone, compared to 26% of drivers with annual household incomes below \$15,000. Among drivers without high school educations, one-quarter were classified as distraction-prone, compared to almost half (47%) of drivers with college degrees. There was almost no difference in the proportions of distraction-prone and distraction-averse drivers by gender.

Perception of Prevalence of Talking and Texting While Driving

Overall, respondents perceive distracted driving to be common, with 70% of respondents stating that more than half of drivers talk on cell phones at least occasionally while driving and 43% of respondents stating that more than half of drivers at least occasionally send text messages or e-mails while driving.

Feeling Unsafe as a Passenger When the Driver Is Distracted

As passengers, almost all respondents would feel very unsafe if their driver was watching a movie (95%), using a laptop (95%), or reading a book or newspaper (95%). The majority would also feel very unsafe if their driver was sending text messages or e-mails (86%) or reading text messages or e-mails (85%). This perception of feeling very unsafe if their driver was sending or reading text messages or e-mails was higher among distraction-averse drivers (95%) than distraction-prone drivers (67%). Forty-one percent of passengers indicated that they would feel safe if their driver were talking on a cell phone with a hands-free device.

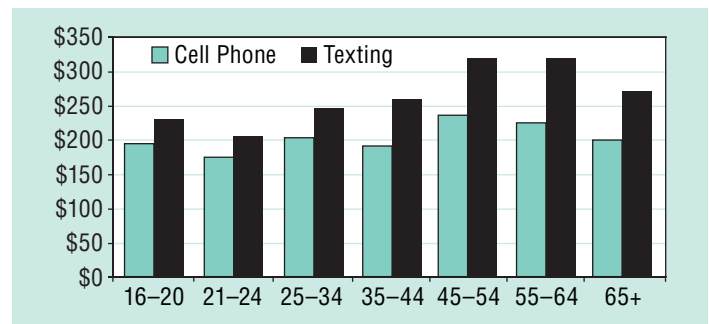
Overall, 66% of respondents stated that they were at least somewhat likely to intervene (by doing or saying something to the driver) as a passenger if their driver were

talking on a cell phone while holding the phone and 87% would intervene if their driver were reading e-mails or text messages.

Support for Bans on Phone Use and Texting

The majority of respondents support state laws banning talking on a hand-held cell phone while driving (74%) and texting or e-mailing while driving (94%). Distraction-averse drivers supported higher cell phone use fines and texting fines (averaging \$229 and \$306, respectively) than distraction-prone drivers (averaging \$173 and \$220, respectively). Looking at age, drivers age 45-64 recommended higher fines for both cell phone use and texting than the other age groups (Figure 3). Overall, respondents recommended higher fines for texting while driving than for using a cell phone while driving.

Figure 2. Average Fine by Age Group for Hand-Held Cell Phone Use and Texting While Driving



Drivers' Perception of Safety

Half of drivers who talk on cell phones while driving report no difference in their driving, when compared to not talking on the cell phone. However, 18% report that they drive more slowly, 17% report that they are distracted and not as aware, and 5% reported that they are more focused and pay more attention to driving when on the phone. One-third of texting drivers reported no difference in their driving, when compared to times when they are not texting. However, 24% of drivers who text reported being distracted and not aware, 21% reported driving more slowly, and 11% reported drifting out of their travel lanes.

How to Order

Download a copy of the 2012 *National Survey of Distracted Driving Attitudes and Behaviors* (171 pages), prepared by Abt SRBI, from <http://www.nhtsa.gov/staticfiles/nti/pdf/811729.pdf>. Kristie Johnson, Ph.D., was the task order manager for this project.



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