

## Driving Distracted

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, motor vehicle accidents are the number one killer of employees. Motor vehicle accidents can cause injury to not just employees, but others on the road as well. Healthcare organizations with employee driving exposures are at risk for a serious crash and may incur costs caused by traffic crashes such as medical care for injuries, property damage, motor vehicle liability, lost productivity, and wages. Additionally, damages awarded to plaintiffs making negligence claims against companies can reach settlements of \$1 million or more.

Distracted driving is a leading cause of motor vehicle accidents, accounting for approximately 9% of all motor vehicle crash fatalities, 14% of which involve cell phone use (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 2017). Healthcare organizations must take steps to reduce distractions for employees while driving by making driver safety part of their culture.

There are three main types of distraction:

- **Visual** — when a driver takes their eyes off the road
- **Manual** — when a driver takes their hands off the wheel
- **Cognitive** — when a driver takes their mind off the act of driving

Distracted driving is any non-driving activity a person engages in that has the potential to distract him or her from the primary task of driving, such as talking on the phone. Science has found that people cannot effectively perform two cognitive tasks at one time. The act of driving is a cognitive task as is the act of having a conversation. While all distractions can endanger drivers' safety, some tasks, like texting, create multiple types of distractions at once, further increasing the risk of a vehicle accident.

Some surprising distracted driving facts (compiled by TeenSafe and The Zebra):

- You are 3 times more likely to get into an accident when distracted by a cell phone while driving.
- 1 out of 3 people text while driving.
- When you send a text, you take your eyes off the road for about 5 seconds. That's the time it takes to drive the length of a football field going 55 MPH.
- Twenty-five percent of drivers surveyed said they felt a high degree of pressure to respond to work-related messages while driving.

While these numbers are significant, they may not state the true size of the problem. The identification of distraction and its role in a crash can be very difficult to determine using only police-reported data. When drivers who had an accident or near-accident due to distracted driving were asked, many said they would repeat the hazardous behavior.

## What can you do to limit the risk to your organization of distracted driving?

**Announce your commitment to employee safety** – According to the National Safety Council, businesses that allow their employees to conduct business on cell phones while driving are putting them at four times a greater risk of a crash. Company policies on cell phone use and employee training on driver safety issues can demonstrate an organization's commitment to a safe workplace.

**Educate employees on the dangers of distracted driving** – A study conducted by the Clinical Congress of the American College of Surgeons (2014) found that educating employees about the dangers of using communication devices while driving reduced the incidence of distracted driving by 50% in hospital personnel. Many employees will recognize that any distraction while driving is a potential risk, but it is important to reinforce this through policy/procedure and regular employee training programs and updates.

**Implement policies and procedures related to cell phone use** – Consider implementation of a corporate cell phone ban and a policy on distracted driving. Ninety-nine percent of organizations with total cell phone bans that responded to a National Safety Council survey saw no decrease in employee productivity. An organizational cell phone ban might ask employees to:

- Turn off wireless phones or other devices before starting the car.
- Inform family, clients and co-workers that they cannot pick up or return calls while they are driving.
- Pull over to a safe location and put the vehicle in park if a call must be made.
- Sign an attestation or safety acknowledgement that they agree to abide by the policy.

**Actively investigate each incident of an on the job motor vehicle accident** – Accident reporting and investigation can prove beneficial to the employer and employee. It allows for identification of how and where risks in the workplace arise. The process may also provide additional knowledge as to how to prevent this same type of accident - or other similar types of accidents - from recurring.

### Conclusion

Employee driving exposures present significant risks to healthcare organizations. By reducing driver distractions, employers can help reduce the chances of a motor vehicle accident. Implementing an effective driver safety program that addresses driving distractions can greatly reduce the risks faced by employees, while also protecting the company's bottom line.



## Additional Resources

OSHA | Guidelines for Employers to Reduce Motor Vehicle Crashes

<https://www.facs.org/media/press-releases/2014/joseph1028>

CDC | Motor Vehicle Safety at Work

<https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/motorvehicle/resources/crashdata/facts.html>

National Safety Council | Free Cell Phone Policy Kit

<https://safety.nsc.org/cellphonekit>

## References

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DISCLAIMER: This is a sample guideline furnished to you by Glatfelter Healthcare Practice. Your organization should review it and make the necessary modifications to meet your organization's needs. The intent of this guideline is to assist you in reducing exposure to the risk of injury, harm, or damage to personnel, property, and the general public. For additional information on this topic, contact your Glatfelter Healthcare Practice Representative at 800.233.1957.

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