



National Telephone Survey on Distracted Driving Attitudes and Behaviors – 2015

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) conducted its third national telephone survey of distracted driving to monitor the public's attitudes, knowledge, and self-reported behavior about cell phone use and texting while driving, and driver choices. The previous distracted driving surveys were conducted in 2010 and 2012. The 2015 survey was administered by phone to 6,011 respondents who were 16 and older. There were 3,873 interviews completed with respondents who were using landline phones, and 2,128 interviews completed with respondents who were using cell phones. The survey oversampled young adults 16 to 34. Interviewing was conducted from January to April 2015.

Changes Since the 2010 Survey

Fewer respondents reported answering cell phone calls while driving. People who said they always answered a call declined from 15% in 2010 to 10% in 2015. People who said they always make calls while driving has stayed relatively constant at 3% in 2010 and 4% in 2015. Meanwhile, the percentage of respondents who said they send text messages at least rarely while driving increased from 16% in 2010 to 20% in 2015.

The proportion of respondents who said they would feel safe if their driver was talking on a handheld cell phone while driving decreased considerably between 2010 and 2015. In 2010, 23% of respondents said they would feel safe in this situation, while only 10% of respondents in 2015 said they would feel safe if their driver was engaged in a phone conversation while holding their cell phone.

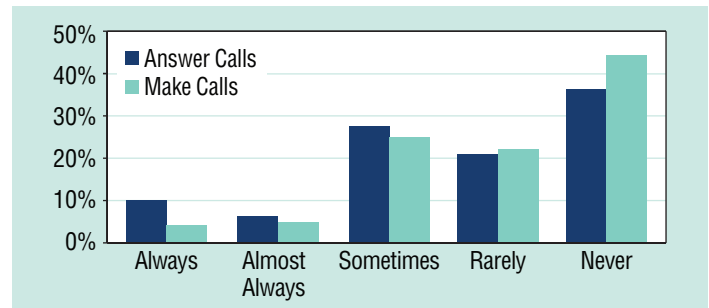
Support for laws banning handheld cell phone use while driving increased from 68% in 2010 to 74% in 2015. Support for laws banning texting while driving remains high, at 92% in 2015.

While the proportion of respondents who indicated that they were a driver in a crash or near-crash in the last year slightly decreased from 14% in 2010 to 12% in 2015, twice as many respondents stated that they were talking on a cell phone or texting when they were involved in a crash or near-crash – 6% in 2010 and 13% in 2015.

Talking on a Cell Phone While Driving

Among respondents, 10% reported always, and 6% reported almost always answering their cell phones while driving (Figure 1). More than half (56%) of these drivers who reported answering the phone while driving said they continue driving while completing their conversations, 17% hand the cell phone to a passenger, 14% inform the caller that they will call them back, and 7% pull over to a safe location to continue the call. Thirty-seven percent of drivers reported never answering their cell phones while driving.

Figure 1. Frequency of Answering and Making Calls While Driving



Of these same respondents, 4% are always, 4% are almost always, and 25% are sometimes willing to make calls while driving (see Figure 1). Forty-four percent of drivers reported never making calls while driving. Of those respondents who indicated that they make calls while driving, most said that they use voice dialing to make calls (51%), as opposed to manually dialing the phone number (29%).

Text Messaging and E-Mailing While Driving

Nearly one in 10 respondents (9%) reported sending text messages or e-mails while driving at least sometimes, while 80% of respondents stated that they never do so. Of the drivers who reported sending texts or e-mails, 44% stated that they wait until they reach a stop light or stop sign to send the message, whereas 14% said they continue to drive while sending messages. Reading text messages or e-mails while driving was slightly more common than sending them, with 12% of respondents stating that they do so at least some of the time, and 75% stating that they never do so.

Using Cell Phone Apps While Driving

Sixteen percent of respondents indicated that they use smartphone apps (not including navigation apps) while driving. Males were more likely than females to use apps while driving (19% versus 12%, respectively). Respondents younger than 35 were most likely to state that they always or almost always use apps while driving (3% to 4%, versus <2%). Music apps were the most frequently used type of app. Overall, nearly half of the respondents (46%) said that they would use an app to block phone calls and text messaging while driving. Drivers 21 to 24 years old were the most likely to state that they already use apps to block incoming calls and texts (3%).

Distraction-Prone Versus Distraction-Averse Drivers

Cluster analysis was used to identify types of drivers based on responses to a series of 15 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, 42% were distraction-prone drivers (n=2,301) and 58% were distraction-averse drivers (n=3,700).

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 the drivers 45 and younger were classified as distraction-prone, compared to 12% of drivers 65 or older. More than half of the drivers with annual household incomes exceeding \$100,000 were classified as distraction-prone, compared to 32% of drivers with annual household incomes below \$15,000. Among drivers without high school educations, one-third (33.5%) were classified as distraction-prone, compared to over half (53%) of drivers with college degrees. There was almost no difference in the proportions of distraction-prone and distraction-averse drivers by gender (42.2% of males and 41.7% of females were distraction-prone).

Perception of Prevalence of Talking and Texting While Driving

Overall, respondents perceived distracted driving to be common, with 69% of respondents stating that more than half of drivers talk on cell phones at least occasionally while driving, and 48% 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 said they would feel very unsafe if their driver was watching a movie (97%) or using a laptop (96%) while driving. The majority said they would also feel very unsafe if their driver was sending text messages or e-mails (86%) or reading text messages or e-mails (81%). This perception of feeling very unsafe if their driver was sending or reading text messages or e-mails was higher among distraction-averse drivers (93%) than distraction-prone drivers (76%). Forty-seven percent of passengers indicated that they would feel safe if their drivers were talking on cell phones with hands-free devices.

Overall, 67% of respondents stated that they were at least somewhat likely to intervene (by doing or saying something to the driver) as passengers if their drivers were talking on cell phones while holding the phones, and 87% said that they would intervene if their drivers were reading e-mails or text messages.

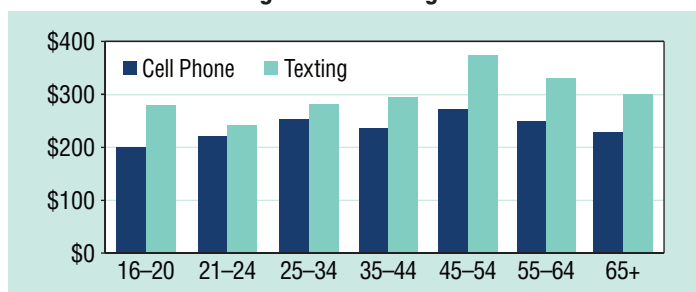


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Support for Bans on Phone Use and Texting

The majority of respondents supported state laws banning talking on a handheld cell phone while driving (74%) and texting or e-mailing while driving (92%). Distraction-averse drivers supported higher cell phone use fines and texting fines (averaging \$263 and \$328, respectively) than distraction-prone drivers (averaging \$209 and \$265, respectively). Looking at age, drivers 45 to 54 recommended higher fines for both cell phone use and texting than the other age groups (Figure 2). Overall, respondents recommended higher fines for texting while driving than for using a handheld cell phone while driving.

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



Drivers' Perception of Safety

Over half of the drivers (53%) who talk on cell phones while driving reported no difference in their driving, when compared to not talking on cell phones. However, 12% reported that they drive more slowly, 20% reported that they are distracted and not as aware, and 4% reported that they are more focused and pay more attention to driving when on the phone. Nearly one-third (31.3%) of texting drivers reported no difference in their driving, when compared to times when they are not texting. However, 34% of drivers who text reported being distracted and not aware, 13% reported driving more slowly, and 4% reported drifting out of their travel lanes.

How to Order

Download a copy of the 2015 *National Survey of Distracted Driving Attitudes and Behaviors* from nhtsa.gov, DOT HS 812 461, 193 pages. Kristie Johnson, Ph.D., was the task order manager for this project.

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