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**Texting and Driving**

When was the last time you were driving and got a text message? Was it today, on your way to work or school? Or was it yesterday on the way to your friend’s house? You receive the text message and divert your attention away from the road and you’re driving. Whether it is at the traffic light while you are stopped or while cruising down the road. In that split second it takes you to look down at your phone and respond to the message you are more likely to be involved in an accident as you become distracted. Now, imagine you are driving down the road on the way to the store and you get a text message from your friend. You check the traffic before you respond to the message; there is a smooth flow of traffic. The text message reads something like, “Hey what are you doing?” You continue to drive and you begin to respond to the text message; “nothing heading to the…” when all of a sudden you look up and there is a sudden stop in traffic, but it is too late for you to stop and you smash into the vehicle in front of you. You erase what you were just typing and respond, “Just got into an accident! OMFG.” Texting while driving is dangerous and has evolved as a major problem occurring everywhere over the years and the best most affordable solution for texting while driving is to simply prevent it in the first place as well as to provide “tools” to reduce the need to physically divert your attention from the road and your driving experience. In order to successfully resolve this problem multiple parties need to be involved; the Department of Transportation of the United States, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Automotive manufacturers, and teenagers or anyone who texts while driving in general.

Texting while driving hands down is dangerous as it is a major distraction and leads to accidents. There are many distractions that many drivers face while driving. Answering calls, multi-tasking, loud music, reading directions, negative emotional stress, and texting while driving are all common examples of distractions while driving. All of these examples take away a driver’s focus on driving. Texting while driving requires you to occasionally glance at your phone and to keep only one hand on the wheel which is a dangerous combination. According to an article taken from texting-while-driving.org by Lesley Pinkston, it states, “texting while driving takes away three critical things needed for safe driving: your hands, your eyes, and your concentration. When you drive and text you run a high risk of getting into an accident” (Texting-while-driving.org). Pinkston argues that three components of safe driving are taken away with texting and driving; your hands, eyes, and concentration. I agree with Pinkston because by taking away these three aspects of driving, these are what make texting while driving so dangerous and such a major distraction which results in unsafe driving and the increase of accidents.

In an ad developed by Coyne and Autoweek, a flyer illustrates the danger of cell phone use and texting while driving. The flyer states “Have you ever played Russian roulette? More people are playing Russian roulette than realize. When you talk on your cell phone while driving it’s like playing Russian roulette. When you text and drive you impair your response time by eighteen percent, or the seconds it takes to miss a stop sign or the time it could take to run an intersection and broadside a family. Don’t use your cell phone and drive; it kills. Whatever you have to say can wait. Unless it’s goodbye,” (Coyne-net.com). This ad creates a powerful message of the dangers of texting while driving. Texting while driving impairs response time, the time it could take to prevent an accident from occurring. This flyer is a compelling argument, as I agree, in the dangers of texting while driving.

There are numerous accident reports, some more fatal than others, that report the cause of accidents by the means of texting. According to AAA auto insurance, “50% of teenage drivers admit to texting while driving,” (AAA Auto Insurance). Also, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration “5,870 people died in car accidents in 2008. An additional 515,000 people were injured. 28% of all accidents in 2008 were caused by drivers between the ages of 18 and 29 that were texting while driving,” (NHTSA). These statistics are alarming as the number of people texting while driving continues to grow every day. With the increase of drivers who text more accidents are likely to occur. An example involved a teen in Utah a few years ago who killed two people. “Reggie Shaw was driving a vehicle while texting when his car crossed over the center line hitting a vehicle, causing is to spin out of control and smash into the car behind him. The victims were killed on impact. Reggie received 30 days in jail and 200 hours of community service while today the same crime would send him to jail up to fifteen years,” (Waugh). This goes to show how tragic texting while driving can be. It is very dangerous and can result in the loss of life. Is it worth it to text and drive? Another example involved a 16 year old girl named Madison Golden. “On October 2, 2008 Madison looked down to read a text and when she looked back up she was off the road. She lost control of her car clipped an oncoming car, flipped two-and-a-half times, and landed upside down in a ditch,” (Waugh). Madison was more fortunate than Reggie as she did not harm anyone else. Dr. Geoffrey Steinberg, a psychologist who studies driver distraction, says “texting while driving is especially dangerous for teenagers. He goes onto to say it is hard for teens to resist checking for messages,” (Waugh). I agree with this as this is illustrated in my life. When I receive a text message I feel the need to read it immediately.

A study in the American Journal of Public Health examined Trends in Fatalities From Distracted *Driving* in the United States, 1999 to 2008. The studied examined trends in distracted driving fatalities and their relation to cell phone use and texting volume using The Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS) which records data on all road fatalities that occurred on public roads in the United States from 1999 to 2008. The journal states “fatalities from distracted driving increased 28% after 2005, rising from 4,572 fatalities to 5870 in 2008.” The study predicted that “increasing texting volumes resulted in more than 16,000 additional road fatalities from 2001 to 2007. The study also stated that distracted drivingis a growing public safety hazard. Specifically, the dramatic rise in texting volume since 2005 appeared to be contributing to an alarming rise in distracted driving fatalities,” (Trends in Fatalities From Distracted Driving in the United States, 1999 to 2008). This study illustrates that texting and driving is indeed a problem as it acts as a distraction to drivers. These distractions are causing fatalities and thus texting while driving is dangerous.

Furthermore, in a scientific journal Reducing Distracted *Driving*: Regulation and Education to Avert Traffic Injuries and Fatalities by Peter D. Jacobson, JD, MPH and Lawrence O. Gostin, JD, studies found that “21% of all reported injury crashes involved distracted driving. Using naturalistic driving data (with cameras tracking driving behavior), the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration found that texting while driving had the highest odds ratio of a serious vehicular crash relative to 16 other activities that draw a driver’s attention from the highway—23.2 times higher than nontexting drivers—and that when texting, drivers take their eyes off the road for 4.6 of 6 second,” (Reducing Distracted *Driving*: Regulation and Education to Avert Traffic Injuries and Fatalities). These results show the dangers of texting as well. The study found texting to be the main source of crashes among other distractions drivers face. Just buy taking your eyes off the road for a few seconds can result in tragedy.

Texting while driving is often compared to drinking and driving. Driving while texting (DWT) can be more dangerous than driving under the influence (DUI). Studies indicate texting while driving impairs a driver’s reaction much more than driving under the influence. “You are four times more likely to get into an accident if you are drinking and driving and eight times more likely to get into an accident if you are texting while driving,” (Texting-while-driving.org). These claims are impressive and unbelievable. Texting and driving is more dangerous than drunk driving. A study compared the distance required to stop while driving 35 mph to an unimpeded driver. The results were “a texting driver travels twenty five more feet before stopping while a drunk driver travels four more feet before stopping,” (Texting-while-driving.org). Texting while driving is a bigger distraction than dunk driving as illustrated by the study. These results are alarming as it shows you are better off driving drunk than texting and driving.

Texting while driving could be seen as an addiction. People know the dangers that come with texting while driving but they continue to text and drive. Why? The same is true with cigarette smokers. They know cigarette smoke increases the chance of developing lung cancer yet they continue to smoke. The reason is they are addicted just like those who text and drive. It is hard to resist texting while driving as it is easy to get away with.

So how do you solve this problem? The best solution is to prevent texting in the first place while driving. This is the safest and most affordable method. This is easier said than done though as drivers will be tempted to read incoming text messages and respond to them while driving. Although many states have passed laws to ban texting while driving and have increased enforcement to these laws it is still reasonably easy to get away with. It is hard for police officers to tell whether an individual is texting while driving. Drivers can simply hide their phone out of sight when texting which goes unnoticed by law enforcement.

As of now I feel that the ban on texting is a good start for now and should be implemented in all fifty states. Innovative technology needs to be made available to everyone that allows drivers to stay focused on the road without having to physically hold or look at their smart phone. These technologies need to be known by drivers and consumers that they are available as well or else they will be rendered useless. For example, the Smartphone application DriveSafe.ly is a technology out today available for android, blackberry, and coming soon to iphone and windows mobile. This mobile app features include: reads your text messages and emails out loud in real time; it is hands Free - no need to touch the phone while driving; one-touch activation - no complicated setup; Bluetooth and radio transmitter compatible; reads text message shorthand (lol, brb); and has an optional customizable auto-responder. The benefits include: eliminates texting while driving and reading emails while driving; allows you to safely stay connected while reducing distracted driving; keep your hands on the wheel and your eyes on the road; allows you be safer and more productive during your commute; lightweight app doesn't slow down phone or drain battery; flexible app allows many customization options. This seems like a feasible solution but not everyone is aware of it.

Automotive manufacturers need to incorporate systems into their vehicles as well. Ford Sync is a current innovative technology on the market that allows hands free calling, traffic alerts, 911 assist, turn by turn directions, music search, and audible text messages with the recent update through voice commands. This is a major stepping stone to safer driving. Technology like this is available but needs to be available in every model and other manufactures as well, just not Ford.

Critics may argue that the costs of these technologies are expensive or that not every situation involving texting while driving is dangerous or unsafe but they are wrong. These technologies are actually fairly inexpensive and a majority of the time situations involving texting and driving are dangerous as already stated.

In conclusion, texting while driving is a major problem that proves to be dangerous and fatal at times. There are many solutions out there already but just need to be taken a little further. For example, technology that is available needs to be available to everyone. People need to know it is available as well.

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