

DISTRACTED DRIVING

COURSE OUTLINE

- **The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration defines "distracted drivers" as those who engage in "any activity that could divert a person's attention away from the primary task of driving".**
 - Distracted driving has been called an "epidemic" and "a new universe of risk".
- **Using a cell phone is one of the most common distracted driving behaviors.**
 - More than 70% of drivers talk on their cell phones while they're driving, and 40% read or send text messages while behind the wheel.
 - One study found that talking on a cell phone quadruples the risk of being in an accident.
 - That number jumps to 23 times more risk when a driver is texting.
- **Distraction can take many other forms as well, such as...**
 - Eating while you drive.
 - Brushing your hair.
 - Glancing at a map.
 - Getting too involved in a discussion with a passenger.
- **Every year, thousands of people are killed and hundreds of thousands are injured in crashes that involve distracted drivers.**
 - As a result, many states have banned driver use of hand-held cell phones, and most states ban driver texting.
- **Distracted driving continues unabated because of people's attitudes towards it.**
 - More than 90% of drivers have said that they recognize the danger from cell phones and other distractions.
 - Yet two-thirds of the same people admitted to talking on a cell phone while driving.
 - 35% said they read or send text messages or email as well.
- **We can no longer write this behavior off as "human nature".**
 - Distracted driving kills people.
 - Its tragic cost demands that we take effective steps to stop it as soon, and as completely, as possible.

- **You can tell that someone is a distracted driver if you see them...**
 - Engrossed in a cell-phone conversation.
 - Texting.
 - Eating or drinking.
 - Brushing their hair.
 - Applying make-up.
 - Talking to passengers.
 - Looking at maps.
 - Adjusting dashboard controls.
- **You can also tell them by their driving.**
 - They're the ones swerving and weaving through traffic, going too fast or too slow, and making sudden starts and stops.
 - These are the things that happen when a driver isn't focused on driving.
- **Distracted drivers are often trying to do too many things at once.**
- **Traffic safety experts organize distractions into three main types... visual, manual and cognitive.**
- **Visual distractions are things that can take your eyes off the road, such as...**
 - Reading an incoming text message.
 - Checking how the kids are doing in the back seat.
 - Verifying a GPS setting.
- **Manual distraction involves taking your hands off the wheel. This happens when you...**
 - Grab your cell phone to answer a call
 - Key in a text message.
 - Pick up that burger you bought at the drive-through.
- **Cognitive distraction means taking your mind off your driving, like when you're...**
 - Arguing with someone on your cell phone.
 - Reacting to your GPS when it tells you you're lost.
 - Obsessing about an upcoming work project.
 - Having an emotional reaction, such as happiness or sadness.

- **Other examples of distraction include...**
 - Looking at something unusual on the roadside, like a funny billboard.
 - Changing the radio station.
 - Worrying about the appointment you're running late for.
 - Turning around to grab something off the back seat.
 - Scanning different "music tracks" to find a song you like.
 - Brushing your hair in the rear-view or visor mirror.
 - Reading a map or written directions.
 - Entering information into your GPS.
- **Another source of serious distraction is other people.**
 - A "back seat driver" might question your navigation, suggest that you reprogram the GPS, or let you know about an upcoming turn.
 - Kids can force you to turn around to see what they are up to or help them with something.
 - Even if the children are quietly amusing themselves, you're always thinking about them.
- **People don't even have to be passengers to distract you from your driving.**
 - They can demand your attention simply by calling you on your cell phone or sending you a text.
 - Other drivers can distract you by honking their horns.
 - Pedestrians can distract you by trying to cross the street.
- **Cell phones are responsible for more "distracted driving" accidents and injuries than any other type of distraction.**
 - Cell phones engage your mind so fully that once you focus on them, you're not driving safely anymore.
 - Studies show that talking to someone who isn't in the car with you is significantly more distracting than talking to a passenger.
- **"Hands-free" calling isn't really much safer, because it can still distract drivers' minds just as much as handheld devices do.**
 - Most newer cars allow you to "sync up" your phone to the cars' audio systems, but you still have to manipulate the controls on the dashboard or steering wheel.
- **Texting can distract you in many ways, because it requires you to...**
 - Look at your phone (a visual distraction).
 - Read and compose messages (cognitive distractions).
 - Key in your own text (a manual distraction).

- **Texting behind the wheel multiplies the risk of having a crash up to 23 times versus talking on the phone.**
 - Simply stopping drivers from texting could prevent so many accidents and injuries.
- **There isn't just one cell phone on the road... there are millions of them.**
 - The National Safety Council estimates that at any given moment, fully 10% of US drivers on the road are talking on their cell phones.
 - Add in all the other drivers being distracted by other things and it's scary to think how many people are at risk, right now, from distracted drivers.
- **At times, trying to combat distracted driving can seem hopeless.**
 - But there are steps that you can take to head it off before you get behind the wheel.
- **First, tell the world you're busy.**
 - Before you drive, record an outgoing voicemail message that tells callers you are driving and will get back to them when you're off the road.
 - This is also a great way to "lead by example", because anyone who receives your message may be encouraged to do the same when they drive.
 - A variety of cell phone apps are also available to disable calling and texting functions, silence alerts, and send customized auto-responses.
- **You should also turn your cell phone off and stow it somewhere.**
 - You'll never be distracted by a phone that doesn't ring, so switch it off or to "silent mode" before you get in the car.
- **You should also prepare navigation ahead of time.**
 - When you plan to use a GPS, program your destination before you drive.
 - Not only will you eliminate an on-the-road interruption, you'll do a better job and get better results.
- **If you prefer a printed map or written directions, review them in advance.**
 - Don't wait until you're on the road to use an Internet-based mapping service, either.
- **Finish dressing and personal grooming before you get behind the wheel.**
 - Brushing your hair or applying makeup takes a lot of concentration.
 - The results can be really bad when you're trying to drive at the same time.

- **Secure children and pets.**
 - Turning around to deal with "loose" kids in the back seat while you're driving can lead to a disaster.
 - So can having an excited or frightened pet running around in the car.
 - Make sure kids are safely seated and belted in, and pets are properly restrained before you turn the ignition key.
- **Get to know your vehicle.**
 - If you're driving an unfamiliar company car or rental, take the time to locate important controls such as headlights, wipers, the defroster and other knobs and buttons you might need in a hurry.
 - Set as many of them as possible before you start your trip.
 - If necessary, ask a coworker for help, or check the driver's manual.
 - Fix the seat position so you can operate pedals comfortably, and adjust all mirrors to minimize your blind spots.
- **Taking steps to prevent distraction before you get behind the wheel is important, but it's just the first step in fighting distraction.**
 - Even with good preparation, there are plenty of things that can happen while you're on the road.
 - Fortunately, there are effective techniques that you can use to stay safe once you're rolling.
- **Focus on your driving.**
 - Trying to "multi-task" behind the wheel is dangerous.
 - Don't ever text, surf the web, read email or talk on a cellphone while driving.
 - Refrain from eating, drinking, reading, grooming, or any other activity that takes your hands off the wheel, or your mind or eyes off the road.
- **When in doubt, pull over.**
 - If you need to make a call, reprogram your GPS, deal with a "kids issue", or anything else that requires your attention, pull over to a safe area first.
- **Your passengers can also be a good resource.**
 - Ask them to take a call, consult the map, reprogram the radio, or provide other help.

- **It's your responsibility to keep focused, so be "cool".**
 - Don't allow yourself to get disturbed or agitated by things inside or outside your vehicle.
 - Whether it's accidents, aggressive drivers, pedestrians, billboards, the unexpected or the interesting, keep your hands, eyes and mind on your driving.
- **You also need to know how to look for other drivers who may be distracted.**
 - These folks can kill you, so sharpen your "spotting" skills.
- **Watch out for drivers who...**
 - Are going much faster or slower than the speed limit or traffic flow...or who needlessly change speed.
 - Stop longer than required at a traffic light or sign.
 - Can't stay in their lane, or are weaving through traffic.
- **If you encounter a distracted driver...**
 - Assume they don't see your car at all.
 - Give them a wide berth by pulling ahead or dropping behind them.
 - If you can't get away, or they are really driving erratically, call 911 and report their behavior to the police.
- **Do not make any effort to get the other driver to pay attention to you.**
 - That can just increase their distraction and the potential for danger.
 - Focus your own attention on your vehicle, your passengers...and yourself.
- **When you're in a car with a distracted driver, you can...**
 - Speak up and let the driver know you're concerned.
 - Be polite and helpful.
 - Calmly say, "You know, I think it's getting a little too crazy in here. Why don't we pull over and sort it out?"
 - Offer to handle the cell phone, deal with navigation or pets, anything that will help to diminish the driver's distractions and promote safety.

*** * * SUMMARY * * ***

- **Distracted driving causes thousands of accidents, injuries and fatalities every year.**
- **Stopping distracted driving begins with each of us individually making a commitment to stick to safe driving habits.**
- **Before you drive, finish getting dressed, putting on make-up and other grooming.**
- **Record an outgoing voicemail on your cell phone, explaining that you're driving and will get back to them later, then turn it off and stow it out of reach.**
- **Adjust seats and mirrors, and pre-program the entertainment system.**
- **Pre-program your navigation system as well.**
- **Make sure kids and pets are safely seated and secured.**
- **On unfamiliar vehicles, locate the important controls and learn how they work.**
- **When you are on the road, stay focused on your driving. If something else needs your attention, pull over.**
- **Steer clear of distracted drivers. If you can't avoid them, call 911.**
- **If you're a passenger in a car driven by a distracted person, speak up. Be helpful.**
- **You can't control other drivers, but you can control your own driving habits.**
- **Keeping your hands on the wheel, your eyes on the road and your mind focused on driving is how you can help to save lives... every minute that you're behind the wheel.**