

Risky Business

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Risky Business: Texting, driving and staying alive don't mix

More legislators across the United States are passing laws to limit or eradicate the use of cellphones in any form while the user is driving. Many of these kinds of state laws differentiate between novice drivers, bus drivers and everyone else. The articles in this case study outline the many different laws that have been or are being passed in an attempt to eliminate dangerous driving habits. They analyze how and if these laws are working. The critical inquiry questions will help you evaluate the information for yourself, and the future implication questions will ask you to apply your knowledge by answering, among other questions, if there are other driving behaviors with which legislators should be concerned?

USA TODAY Snapshots®



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Many teens admit risky driving habits

By Sharon Silke Carty
USA TODAY

DETROIT - Teen drivers admit that they're prone to text messaging, talking on cellphones and hauling their friends around in the car.

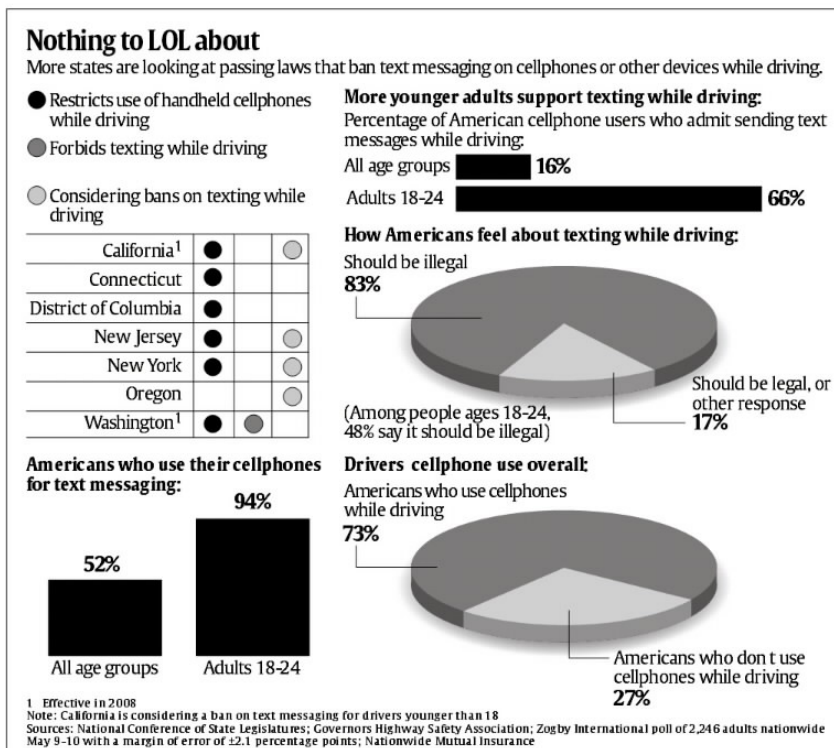
A joint survey conducted by AAA and Seventeen magazine of 1,000 teens in April showed young drivers engage in risky behavior behind the wheel, prompting safety advocates to call for parents to be more aware of what their kids are doing when they leave with the car keys.

On average, 10 teens die every day in vehicles driven by themselves or other teens. Fatal accidents for 16- and 17-year-old drivers jump 20% in July and August, making them the deadliest months for teen drivers.

"School is out, and teens aren't just driving from school to home to work," says Ann Shoket, editor of Seventeen. "There are road trips, parties, more social activities. Their parents might loosen up on where and when they can drive for the summer because they just want to get the teens out of their hair for some time."

The survey showed 61% of teens admitting to risky driving habits. Of that 61%:

- ▶ Nearly 50% said they text message while driving, and 51% talk on cellphones.
- ▶ 58% say they drive with their friends in the car even though having other teens in a car can dramatically increase the likelihood of an accident.
- ▶ 40% say they speed.



By Adrienne Lewis, USA TODAY

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► 11% say they drink or use drugs before driving despite years of attempts to educate teens about the dangers of drinking or using drugs and driving.

Shoket isn't surprised so many teens think they can multitask while driving. Adults engage in the some of the same behaviors. But pairing teen driver inexperience with unnecessary distractions can be lethal. Parents need to step in and enforce rules prohibiting texting, changing the radio station and driving with friends, Shoket says.

"We feel so capable at multitasking," she says. "But when it comes to driving, you can only be single-tasking."

The data don't surprise Barbara Harsha, executive director of the Governors Highway Safety Association, either.

A few weeks ago, the GHSA held a teen safe-driving camp with Ford Motor, and Harsha says she was shocked to hear of a teenage participant who took time out of her lesson to re-apply her blush — while driving.

"Young kids just don't realize what's involved in driving and what the risks are if you don't concentrate," Harsha says. "The AAA survey shows just what risky behaviors young drivers are involved in, and the need for close parental supervision, especially in the first six months."



By David Stuckey and Alejandro Gonzalez, USA TODAY

More states say phones and driving don't mix

By Michelle Kessler
USA TODAY

SAN FRANCISCO — On July 1, California will become the largest state to ban unlimited cellphone use by drivers. The law prohibits drivers under 18 from talking on the phone, and it requires older drivers to use a hands-free headset.

A similar law goes into effect the same day in Washington state. Legislation has already been passed in New York, Washington, D.C., and elsewhere — and more laws are pending. What's a chatty driver to do? USA TODAY reporter Michelle Kessler asked insurance and driving experts to explain the hodgepodge of new restrictions, and what they mean for car- and cellphone-loving Americans:

Q: Is it legal to drive while talking on a cellphone?

A: It depends on where you are. In the USA, states — and some cities — set cellphone driving laws. They vary widely.

Idaho permits all cellphone use. Washington, D.C., prohibits learner's permit holders and school bus drivers from talking on the phone at all — and requires other drivers to use a headset or other hands-free device.

Laws also vary outside the USA. Germany and Australia are among countries that restrict cellphone use in cars.

Q: Just how dangerous is driving while talking on a cellphone?

A: The risk of having an "injury crash" increases four-fold when a driver is on the phone, says Anne McCartt, a vice president with the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, a research group funded by auto insurers.

Q: What makes talking on a cellphone more dangerous than talking to a passenger in the car, or listening to the radio?

A: Researchers are still investigating precise brain functions of cellphone-chatting drivers. Early evidence suggests the problem is "cognitive distraction from the conversation," McCartt says.

A driver and a passenger who are having a conversation can both see the road. The conversation will likely stop if something unexpected happens.

But if a driver is having a conversation over a cellphone, the person at the other end of the line can't see the road — so he or she keeps talking when something dangerous occurs. That prevents the driver from completely focusing, McCartt says.

Talk radio doesn't cause the same problem because it's passive, she says. Drivers just listen and aren't ex-



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pected to respond. That frees up more brain power for focusing on the road.

Q: Is using a hands-free headset safer?

A: Surprisingly, no, says Jonathan Adkins, a spokesman for the Governors Highway Safety Association, a trade group representing state highway safety departments. Studies have shown that drivers using headsets are just as distracted, he says. Although hands-free laws sound good on paper, "We think it's best for states not to pass more legislation," he says. "Let's focus on the research and the data. We need a good highway (cellphone) safety law, and we don't have that yet."

Q: What about text messaging or dialing when driving?

A: Research on texting and dialing is still in the early stage. In general, "it's dangerous" to do anything distracting while driving, Adkins says.

Q: Are cellphone driving laws effective?

A: It depends on the law. Handheld cellphone use among drivers fell 50% in Washington, D.C., after it required drivers to use hands-free devices, an Insurance Institute study says. But a similar New York law had little impact. And cellphone use among teenage

drivers in North Carolina went up after the state prohibited it, McCartt says.

"The law has to be enforced, and the enforcement has to be publicized," McCartt says.

Q: How will travelers find out what the cellphone law is in a particular area?

A: They probably won't. Although new laws get lots of publicity, it usually fades over time. And travelers are likely to miss the latest news.

California has launched a media blitz about its new law, for example. But it hasn't specifically asked rental car agencies to warn out-of-state renters, says Jan Mendoza, spokeswoman for the California Department of Motor Vehicles.

States restrict drivers' cellphone use

Twenty-seven states and the District of Columbia have passed laws limiting the use of cellphones by drivers.

The types of bans:

- ▶ **Handheld:** Using a cellphone without a headset or other hands-free device
- ▶ **Text:** Sending text messages while driving
- ▶ **Some drivers:** Any cellphone use among certain drivers, such as school bus drivers or drivers under 18

Alaska	text
Arizona	some drivers
Arkansas	some drivers
California	handheld, text, some drivers
Colorado	some drivers
Connecticut	handheld, text, some drivers
Delaware	text, some drivers
D.C.	handheld, text, some drivers
Georgia	some drivers
Illinois	some drivers
Kentucky	some drivers
Maine	text, some drivers
Maryland	text, some drivers
Massachusetts	some drivers
Minnesota	text, some drivers
Nebraska	text, some drivers
N. Jersey	handheld, text, some drivers
New Mexico	handheld
New York	handheld
North Carolina	text, some drivers
Oregon	text, some drivers
Rhode Island	some drivers
Tennessee	some drivers
Texas	text, some drivers
Utah	handheld
Virginia	text, some drivers
Washington	handheld, text
West Virginia	text, some drivers

Sources: AAA, Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, Governors Highway Safety Association



Edward C. Baig and Jefferson Graham review the Jawbone Bluetooth headset at tech.usatoday.com

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To play it safe, stay off the phone no matter where you are.

Q: Can someone get in trouble for talking on a cellphone in a state that doesn't specifically prohibit it?

A: Yes. Most states have reckless driving laws that allow police to pull over anyone doing anything that they think is dangerous. If your conversation is causing you to drive erratically, you can get a ticket, Mendoza says.

Q: How much are the fines?

A: It varies. In California, the base fine ranges from \$20 to \$50 — and it can triple if certain penalties are applied. In Washington, fines start at \$124.

Other restrictions may apply. The Washington law does not allow police to pull over drivers strictly for cellphone violations.

They must be pulled over for another infraction, but can then be hit with a secondary cellphone offense.

Q: How do driving laws affect the cellphone industry?

A: They cause sales of headsets and other hands-free systems to go up. "We definitely see an impact in a positive way," says Larry Rougas, a vice president at Pioneer.

The electronics-maker builds hands-free systems for cars that range from about \$150 to more than \$1,000. Sales rose after New York passed cellphone driving restrictions, and the company expects a similar boost in California. In response, Pioneer is broadening its product offerings.

"As more and more states are coming on board, we're starting to offer systems at a higher price point," Rougas says.

Q: Are more cellphone driving laws expected to be passed?

A: Probably. Hawaii and Massachusetts are among the states considering new restrictions.

Don't text and drive

This Memorial Day weekend, a record number of Americans - 32.4 million, up 1.5% from last year - will drive at least 50 miles, according to AAA, the first increase in three years. Gas is cheaper (it was more than \$4 last year), and a car trip over a long weekend is not as big a splurge as the big summer vacation that many are forgoing in hard economic times.

What's not to like? Not much. But this year, two standard road safety warnings - wear a seat belt, don't drink and drive - aren't enough. Add this: Don't text and drive.

Text-messaging is the new scourge of the roads - overtaking the long-running debate over whether to restrict drivers' cellphone use. Twelve states and Washington, D.C., already ban text-messaging for all drivers. Ten more states ban it for novice drivers or those younger than 18.

Studies increasingly confirm what is in plain sight on too many roads. Texting while driving is distracting (far more so than cellphones) and potentially deadly. Especially for younger drivers, who are more tech-savvy and addicted to texting than older people. Even before texting arrived, teenagers

were four times more likely to be involved in an automobile crash.

One new poll found that one in four people admitted to texting while driving, including two thirds of those ages 16-19. A recent study showed that teens slow down, weave in and out of lanes, and run over pedestrians when they texted while using a driving simulator. It's not hard to find news stories that blame deadly crashes on texting, distracted drivers - and not just on the road. Texting was blamed for a train crash in Los Angeles last year in which 25 died.

Texting bans seem certain to spread, perhaps with impact similar to the annual summer "Click It or Ticket" campaign that has helped raise seat belt use from about 11% in the 1980s to 83% last year.



Meanwhile, a message to Memorial Day drivers: Leave texting or Tweeting to your passengers.

Critical Inquiry Questions:

1. What are some risky habits some teens engage in while driving? What makes them risky? If adults are also engaging in these behaviors, why do these behaviors end up more lethal for teens?
2. Why would driving fatalities increase for teens during the summer?
3. In July 2008, a California law went into effect that prohibits drivers under 18 from talking on the phone. Older drivers must use a hands-free headset. At least 10 states specifically ban texting for “novice drivers” or those under 18. Is this fair? Is it discrimination against youth? Why do you think lawmakers made these distinctions? Are those distinctions valid when it comes to driving and distractions? Why or why not?
4. Why is talking on a cellphone while driving more dangerous than talking to a passenger?
5. Before texting existed, teenagers were four times more likely to be involved in an auto crash. How do you think this statistic changes when teens are texting while driving?
6. Currently, 12 states and Washington D.C. ban text messaging for all drivers. Do you think more states should enact similar laws? Or should those 12 states repeal their laws? Why?

Future Implication Questions:

1. Statistics and research indicate that driving while distracted causes accidents. What other behaviors have you seen people engaging in while driving? Are any of these behaviors more dangerous than texting while driving? Why? Take 10 minutes and write a letter to your congressman; in this letter, describe one of these dangerous behaviors and ask your congressman to support legislation. Be specific about the dangers of this behavior and what actions you would like the legislature to take to penalize or eradicate this behavior.
2. Technology changes daily. In the 1980s, cellphones were very large devices and now they can be the size of a credit card, complete with full keyboard. Where do you see cellphone and PDA technology going in the next 10 years? What new distractions could these provide for drivers? Find a partner and discuss the new features of future wireless communication technology and at least three ways to prevent these new features from becoming a distraction for drivers.
3. With a blank piece of paper, create a five-question survey for your classmates regarding their opinions on driving while talking or texting on cell phones. First, decide what information you want to find out. Do you want to know if they think some of these laws discriminate against age? Do you want to know how they feel about the laws? Do you want to discover if these laws impact their current habits at all? You may want to use a scale that helps those you are surveying quantify their agreement or disagreement with a statement by using these responses for some of the questions: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree. Survey a minimum of 25 classmates; then create a chart or charts that represent your findings.

Choices and Consequences:

Directions: Our choices and behaviors always create some kind of consequence—some good, some bad. As you read the articles in this case study, list some behaviors or actions someone took (like texting) in the “Causes” boxes in the left column. Then, in the “Effects” boxes in the right column, list what the results of each action. Were the results or consequences positive ones? Were the results desired? If not, what other actions might bring about the desired results or effects? Remember, one cause may have many effects, and effects may also be caused by more than one thing.

CAUSE



EFFECT

Links to Additional Research:

Teen Driving:

www.teendriving.com

Texas Leads in Curbing Teen Driving Deaths:

www.cbsnews.com/stories/2009/07/28/eveningnews/main5194584.shtml

Cell Phones and Teen Driving:

blog.mediafamily.org/?p=122

Texting Drivers, Tempting Fate:

www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1913349,00.html

Curbing Teen Driver Risks:

www.cbsnews.com/stories/2007/07/05/earlyshow/living/parenting/main3018347.shtml