

# Get the **FACTS**

Commonly asked questions and misconceptions about distracted driving and texting/hands-free laws

## **Would having a hands-free law really make a difference in changing behavior?**

Laws do make a difference when it comes to behavior. In fact, 12 out of 15 states and the District of Columbia experienced a drop in fatalities within two years after passing primary hands-free laws, while two other states (New Hampshire and Oregon) did not have sufficient data to report.<sup>1</sup> The average decrease was 15.3 percent. Strong highway safety laws coupled with publicized enforcement are proven countermeasures for changing driver behavior.

## **Would work productivity suffer if people can't use hand-held devices in their cars?**

In a survey of Fortune 500 companies that implemented total cell phone bans, only 7 percent of respondents said productivity had decreased, while 19 percent thought it had actually increased.<sup>2</sup> Being distracted by a phone not only puts the driver and others at risk, but an employer can be held legally accountable for negligent employee actions. Companies with strong safety cultures ban phones to protect employees and the communities in which they operate.

## **Is distracted driving really that big of a problem in Missouri?**

From 2016–2020, 407 people died in Missouri crashes involving a distracted driver.<sup>3</sup> Cell phone-related crashes have increased in Missouri by 30 percent in the last five years, with nearly 2,500 crashes alone in 2019. However, these crashes are likely underestimated because drivers don't always admit to phone usage. In a May 2021 Missouri Capitol hearing, Lt. Collin Stosberg of the Missouri State Highway Patrol indicated that distracted driving crashes could be tenfold what they are reported to be. "Inattention is the leading cause of crashes in Missouri," he testified. "Distraction is an epidemic."

## **It's already against the law in Missouri to drive carelessly and imprudently. Why do we need another law?**

By the time police officers can stop drivers for Careless and Imprudent driving (C&I), they have already committed a violation that endangers both lives and property. A more comprehensive texting law or a hands-free law would allow law enforcement to stop someone simply for the violation of texting or using their phone behind the wheel before they actually commit a C&I violation, thereby reducing the chance of a traffic crash, injury or fatality.

## **Why are we so worried about distracted driving when self-driving cars will solve this problem soon?**

While most new vehicles on the road have some form of advanced driver assistance features (ADAS), such as automatic emergency braking or blind spot warning (Level 2 of vehicle autonomy), fully self-driving vehicles (Level 5) could be decades away from being widely used by consumers.<sup>4</sup> Automotive experts, including MIT researchers, say today's roads and infrastructure are not well equipped for autonomous vehicles. Weather can disrupt these car systems, and existing traffic laws will have to be adjusted to take into account this new technology, which will also take time.

## **Why should we limit drivers who only check their phones or text when they're at stoplights?**

In a study performed by the University of Utah and sponsored by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, researchers found drivers can experience a "hangover effect" where the mind stays distracted for up to 27 seconds after using smartphones or voice-to-text vehicle infotainment systems to send text messages, make phone calls or update social media.<sup>5</sup> Even if drivers perform some of these tasks while at a red light, once they start moving, their minds are still not fully focused on the task of driving for up to 27 seconds, which puts other drivers, pedestrians and cyclists at risk.



Sources: <sup>1</sup>[tinyurl.com/OhioReport](https://tinyurl.com/OhioReport); <sup>2</sup>[tinyurl.com/NSCReport](https://tinyurl.com/NSCReport); <sup>3</sup>[savemolives.com/mcrs/distracted-driving](https://savemolives.com/mcrs/distracted-driving); <sup>4</sup>[tinyurl.com/automatedvehicles](https://tinyurl.com/automatedvehicles); <sup>5</sup>[tinyurl.com/hangovereffect](https://tinyurl.com/hangovereffect). The Hands-Free Missouri Coalition is composed of corporations, law enforcement, pedestrian and bicycle groups, state agencies, healthcare and other safety organizations that have joined together to advocate for safer laws to combat distracted driving.