

## **Driver Distractions Are a Major Cause of Motor Vehicle Accidents**

Driver distractions are a contributing cause in approximately 25 percent of all reported motor vehicle crashes or roughly 1.2 million accidents per year, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. If anything, the actual number is likely higher because distractions can be hard to quantify and the true number of accidents caused by driver distractions is difficult to define.

Our changing driving habits and increased dependence on technology have steadily raised the number of potentially dangerous distractions. Consider the attention-diverters in your own car - radio and climate controls, cell phones and navigation systems. Matters are complicated further when there is more than one distraction, such as eating while trying to discipline a child in the backseat.

Cell phones have quickly become one of the leading driver distractions and, as a result, more and more states have placed restrictions on drivers' use of cell phones. The number of wireless phone users in the U.S. has grown from five million in 1990 to more than 200 million today, and surveys show that 85 percent of these people use cell phones when behind the wheel. In fact, calls from moving vehicles account for half of all cellular air time use.

So what can you do to avoid falling into this trap? Consider the following anti-distraction tips:

- \* Keep your eyes on the road by using a hands-free telephone, and utilizing memory-dialing and directory assistance when possible.
- \* Keep your hands on the wheel by programming your favorite radio stations, and arranging tapes and CDs in an easily accessible spot. Don't attempt to retrieve objects that have fallen on the floor while driving.
- \* Teach your children the importance of good behavior in the car.
- \* Avoid eating and drinking while driving. If you must, choose easy-to-handle foods and keep beverages in a nearby cupholder.
- \* Designate the front-seat passenger to serve as navigator rather than fumbling with maps and navigation systems yourself.
- \* Take a break if you find yourself lost in thought.
- \* Avoid stressful or confrontational conversation while driving.