



GSLC – SAFETY MOMENT

Distracted Driving

Distracted driving has become an increasingly present behavior amongst those behind steering wheels of all types of vehicles. Research indicates that while there are many sources of distractions, cell phones and digital devices are major contributors to the increase in driving risks. Driving distractions can be categorized into three types: visual, manual and cognitive.

Visual Distractions

When driving a vehicle, it is critical to keep your eyes actively scanning road conditions at all times. Research has repeatedly shown that anything that takes the drivers eyes off of the road greatly increases the risk of a crash.

Consider a parent driver that is eating while driving a vehicle full of Scouts returning home from camp. While eating and driving a little bit of mayonnaise falls on his shirt. The driver takes his eyes off of the road for just three seconds to see what the damage is and consider the methods of cleaning up that will be needed before stepping out of the car at home. If the driver is travelling at 65 miles an hour, he will have travelled over the distance of a full football field without being aware of any changes that have happened in the pathway ahead. This mayonnaise distraction could end up being the cause of serious injuries or fatalities.

Visual distractions for a driver can take one of many different forms. The distractions may come from inside of the vehicle such as may be the case when the driver makes eye contact with that rowdy Scout in the back, looking at a mobile device or even glancing down to change the radio station. The distraction may also come from the outside when looking at wildlife along the side of the road or engaging in rubbernecking when passing a crash that occurred and is now on the side of the roadway.

Manual Distractions

Manual distractions refer to those types of activities that occur when driving that require the driver to remove their hands from the steering wheel which greatly reduces reaction time and ability to control the vehicle. Activities such as eating, grooming, manipulating a digital device including texting, reaching to grab something from the floor or retrieve any items from the back seat while driving would qualify as manual distractions.

Cognitive Distractions

Cognitive distractions are less obvious than visual and manual distractions but can be just as deadly.

Research clearly shows that our brains can only concentrate on one thing at a time and has shown that any notions that one has of being very good at multitasking are incorrect. Our brains are just not equipped to handle one active thinking task at a time. It has been shown that if our minds are actively occupied in thought, we cannot concentrate on or see the things that are right in front of us.

Furthermore, the researchers have been able to determine that engaging in a conversation with passengers, another person via cell phone, or even with the voice activated entertainment systems in vehicles take a heavy toll on cognitive resources making it much more dangerous to drive. As proof of this there is a growing number of accidents involving pedestrians, those riding bicycles, and unheeded stoplights where the driver has been awake and speaking on their hands free vehicle's mobile phone, looking straight ahead at the time of the incident. These drivers explain that they 'did not see' the hazard ahead. They did not see because they were unable to process what was in front of them due to the fact that their mind was mostly occupied with listening and forming responses in conversation.

Cognitively, actions such as listening to the radio or an audiobook while driving take much less effort than the task of conversation or vocally manipulating the hands free communication and entertainment systems that are becoming increasingly present in newer vehicles.

Summary

As a driver, you are responsible to ensure that your eyes are focused on the road ahead, that your hands are on the steering wheel at all times, and that your mind is fully engaged in the task at hand of transporting you and your passengers safely to your destination: **your life and the lives of those you transport depend on it!**