

COMPASS



Red Light

Distracted driving is everyone's problem

by rhea maze

Angelina, a 15-year-old high school sophomore, was walking near her home when she was struck and killed by a pickup truck. The driver was composing a text message...

Justin lost his life at 19 during a 29-second cell phone conversation when he didn't notice that the car in front of him was slowing to turn, even though he was looking at it...

Hillary, a 26-year-old hairdresser, was texting when she crossed the median, rolled three times and was thrown 75 feet from her car. The severe brain trauma and injuries she sustained resulted in her no longer being able to work, drive or remember most of her life, including getting married or giving birth to her son...

These stories are among many nationwide tragedies, made all the more heartbreaking by their preventable circumstances. One awareness campaign asks individuals the question: how many traffic fatalities are acceptable between you and your family members and your very close friends? The answer of course is always zero. Yet the fact remains that distracted driving kills thousands and injures hundreds of thousands of people each year.

Distracted driving occurs whenever a driver engages in another activity while driving, such as using electronic devices, eating or adjusting the radio. Colorado State Patrol (CSP) categorizes this behavior "inattentive to driving" and identified it as the leading cause

of all 2013 vehicle crashes and crash fatalities in the northeast region of Colorado, which includes Larimer County.

"Inattentiveness is the top reason why people crash," says Major Tim Keeton, District 3 commander with CSP. "This has been consistent over time and was actually consistent before the days of cell phones—but cell phones have become the biggest distraction."

Currently, no state bans all cell phone use for all drivers. In Colorado, all drivers are prohibited from texting but only drivers under 18 are banned from all cell phone use in the car.

A University of Utah study found that the risks associated with cell phone use while driving may be as great as driving while intoxicated. They observed that cell phone users were involved in more accidents and found that the driving impairments associated with handheld versus hands-free conversations were not statistically different.

Cell phone use, whether hands-free or handheld, requires the brain to multitask. According to the National Safety Council, multitasking cannot be done safely while driving. Using a cell phone compromises the brain's ability to take in and effectively process critical driving cues—resulting in drivers who may be looking at but not really seeing up to 50 percent of the information in their driving environment.



Looking off the road for five seconds to send a text when traveling 55 miles per hour is equivalent to driving the length of a football field blindfolded.

▶ continued on page 4

**I
N
S
I
D
E**

The drowning response
What to watch out for **2**

The taste of summer
Bring the tropics to your kitchen **3**

The Early Childhood Council of Larimer County
Giving kids the best possible start **5**

Special Insert:
Health District 2013 Annual Report

The trails are yours
Get your daily dose of green exercise **6**

Health District news
Board election results
HD receives bike award
Free cholesterol tests in September **7**
Warm-up Ride a success

A 2013 state of Colorado distracted driver study, sponsored by the Colorado Department of Transportation and carried out by Colorado State University's Institute of Transportation Management, found 15.6 percent of drivers to be distracted at any one given time. The top distraction by far for all drivers was talking on the cell phone, followed by drinking or eating, texting, smoking and reaching for an object.



The National Safety Council estimates that 26 percent of all motor vehicle crashes involve cell phone use.



A Virginia Tech Transportation Institute study showed that physically dialing a phone while driving increases the risk of a crash as much as six times. Texting increases the risk by 23 times.



About 46 percent of Larimer County residents report sometimes, usually or always using a cell phone while driving, according to the Health District's 2013 Community Health Survey, and 71 percent of respondents favored a cell phone prohibition.

"It's a problematic situation," says Dr. James Francis, founder and director of CSU's Institute of Transportation Management and the

principal investigator of the study. "Having roughly

15 percent of drivers distracted is significant when you look at the number of licensed drivers in Colorado."

Francis hopes to repeat the study next year and would like to see more people become aware of the dangers of distracted driving. "The number one take-home message is to not do it," he says.

One of the main issues with distracted driving is that everyone thinks it's a problem, but most people don't think they're part of it...

Do you drive with your cell phone in the cup holder? Fiddle with the stations? Use long commutes as a good time to catch up with family and friends? Looking off the road for five seconds to send a text when traveling 55 miles per hour is equivalent to driving the length of a football field blindfolded.

"It's simply a matter of not paying full attention to what you're doing at the time—but things happen fast and can change quickly," Keeton says.

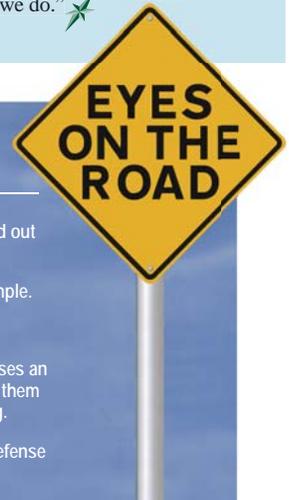
Everyone is busy. Putting away the phone and other distractions takes intentional, conscious effort before it can become as habitual as putting on your seat belt. It helps to remind yourself that the messages will still be there when you stop.

"Take a few minutes to make any communications you need to before you start driving and plan ahead so that you don't have to eat in the car," Keeton says. "Make a resolute decision that you're not going to drive distracted—because getting behind the wheel is statistically one of the most dangerous things we do."



Stay Safe

- 1 Turn off electronic devices or put them out of sight and out of reach before starting to drive.
- 2 Be a role model for young drivers and set a good example.
- 3 Talk with teens about responsible driving.
- 4 Speak up when you are a passenger and your driver uses an electronic device while driving. Offer to make calls for them if necessary so that their full attention stays on driving.
- 5 Always wear your seat belt. Seat belts are your best defense against other unsafe drivers.



From the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration:

- Nationwide, 74 percent of drivers support bans on handheld phone use while driving and 94 percent support bans on texting while driving.
- At any given daylight moment across America, approximately 660,000 drivers are using cell phones or manipulating electronic devices while driving.
- In 2012, 3,328 people were killed and an estimated 421,000 were injured in distraction-related crashes nationwide.
- One National Highway Traffic Safety Administration study showed that drivers who performed any cell phone use while stopped at an intersection were less likely to properly scan the intersection prior to advancing than drivers who did not use a cell phone while stopped.

Be Informed

- The official U.S. government website for distracted driving: distraction.gov
- The National Safety Council: nsc.org
- Advocates for cell-free driving: focusdriven.org



Take the Pledge



Distracted driving kills and injures thousands of people each year.



I pledge to:



Protect lives by never texting or talking on the phone while driving.

Be a good passenger and speak out if the driver in my car is distracted.



Encourage my friends and family to drive phone-free.

Signature: _____

Date: _____