

PRESS RELEASE

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A DISTRACTED DRIVER IS JUST AS DANGEROUS AS AN INTOXICATED DRIVER

Montreal, May 13, 2008 — Driver distraction can sometimes seem to be a very abstract topic of discussion; however, it is a very real problem that has been well documented. A recent study by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) revealed that driver inattention is the cause of 80% of motor vehicle accidents. This is a worrisome statistic.

Using your cellphone at the wheel

The use of a cellphone at the wheel is a source of distraction that is too often underestimated. According to the same NHTSA study, holding a handset while driving increases the risk of collision threefold. Moreover, in many cases, drivers who are busy on their cellphones are just as impaired as drivers who are intoxicated. This is certainly food for thought.

In this regard, the insurance industry welcomes the new regulation that came into effect on April 1, 2008, prohibiting the use of cellphones while driving. From now on, only the hands-free devices will be allowed. However, "hands-free" is not a magical solution. A telephone conversation remains a source of distraction that can affect driving ability.

Other kinds of risky behaviour

Driving while talking on a cellphone has been a popular topic of discussion these past few months, but we have to keep in mind that other seemingly harmless behaviours represent threats to road safety as well. Who hasn't witnessed a woman putting on her makeup at a red light? Or a man consumed by the sports section of his newspaper while stuck in traffic? Even though reading and putting on makeup are simple tasks, they triple the probability of causing a traffic accident.

Trying to locate something like a bottle of water that is rolling around on the back seat of the car while you are driving increases the risk of collision ninefold. Most cars are equipped with beverage holders. Use them.

Driver fatigue: another source of inattention

Fatigue is another factor that has an impact on driving skills. Fatigue increases the driver's reaction time and decreases alertness and judgement. As a result, the risk of having an accident is increased significantly. Lack of sleep combined with driving a car is a dangerous mix that should be avoided. Going without sleep for more than 17 consecutive hours is comparable to having a blood alcohol level of 0.05%; going without sleep for more than 24 hours is comparable to having a blood alcohol level of 0.1%, which is significantly above the legal limit of 0.08%.

An alarming fact: one out of five Canadians (20%) admits to having dozed off at the wheel during the past year. This sad fact is reflected in the statistics. Driver fatigue is responsible for more than 400 deaths in this country every year. That's more than one death per day.

Concentrate on your driving

Driving a car remains a complex task that requires all of the driver's attention. We can all play an active role in limiting risky behaviours while driving. Although you may be a defensive and responsible driver, everyone can experience a moment of distraction that could cause an accident. In the event that you have an accident, don't worry: if your insurance policy includes *All Perils* or *Collision* or *Upset* coverage, the damage to your vehicle will be covered.

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