
Large Majority of Drivers Who Own Cell Phones Use Them While Driving Even Though They Know This Is Dangerous

Most believe that hands-free cell phones are safer but do not use them

ROCHESTER, N.Y. – June 8, 2009 – Most drivers who own cell phones use them while driving even though almost all of them believe it is dangerous to do so. A quarter of drivers with cell phones sends or receives text messages while driving. Most drivers with cell phones use hand-held rather than hands-free phones although they believe that hands-free phones are safer. Even in states where it is illegal for drivers to use hand-held phones, half of cell phone users do so. This Harris Poll also shows that most drivers who use cell phones believe that using hands-free phones is safer than using hand-held phones, contrary to the evidence of available research that suggests that it is the minds, not the hands, of drivers that are adversely affected by talking on the phone.

These are some of the findings of The Harris Poll, a new nationwide survey of 2,681 U.S. adults surveyed online between May 11 and 18, 2009 by Harris Interactive.

These findings support the views of the [National Safety Council](#) that most drivers ignore the evidence about the risks of using cell phones and the advice of safety experts. A 2003 study by the Harvard Center of Risk Analysis estimated that cell phone use while driving contributed to six percent of crashes, which equated to 636,000 crashes, 330,000 injuries, 12,000 serious injuries and 2,600 deaths each year. The study also put the annual financial toll of cell phone-related crashes at \$43 billion.

“Studies show that driving while talking on a cell phone is extremely dangerous and puts drivers at a four times greater risk of a crash,” said Janet Froetscher, president and CEO of the National Safety Council. “Drunk driving is also dangerous and against the law. When our friends have been drinking, we take car keys away. It’s time to take the cell phone away.”

Key findings in this Harris Poll include:

- 72% of those who drive and own cell phones say they use them to talk while they are driving;
- Most of these people (66%) say they usually use hand-held rather than hands-free telephones to talk;
- Even in states that have banned the use of hand-held cell phones while driving, half (49%) of cell phone users use hand-held, rather than hands-free, phones;
- Only 2% of those who use cell phones while driving believe this is not dangerous at all. Most believe it is very dangerous (26%), dangerous (24%) or somewhat dangerous (33%);

- A 71% majority of those who use cell phones while driving believes that hands-free cell phones are safer than hand-held phones (even though some research suggest otherwise);
- Younger drivers are more likely than older drivers to talk on the phone while driving. Most (58%) “Matures” (people older than Baby Boomers, currently aged 64 or over) who drive and own cell phones say they do not use their cell phones while driving; and,
- A quarter of drivers with cell phones report using them to send or receive text messages while driving, although a large majority (74%) does not.

So What?

These findings point to several important conclusions:

1. Cell phone use by drivers is very widespread and is, therefore, a major health care risk.
2. Large numbers of people do not obey state laws that forbid the use of hand-held phones.
3. Most people believe, perhaps wrongly, that hands-free cell phone use is safer than using hand-held phones.
4. Many millions of drivers send and receive text messages while driving, possibly a greater risk than talking on the phone.

These results suggest the need for a major campaign to greatly reduce drivers’ cell phone use and texting.

**TABLE 1A
FREQUENCY OF TALKING ON CELL PHONE WHILE DRIVING- BY REGION – TREND
SINCE 2006**

“How often do you talk on a cell phone while you are driving?”

Base: Adults who drive and have a cell phone

	2006	May 2009
	%	%
Talk on Cell Phone While Driving (NET)	73	72
All the time	6	10
Sometimes	67	62
Never	27	28

TABLE 1B
FREQUENCY OF TALKING ON CELL PHONE WHILE DRIVING- BY AGE

“How often do you talk on a cell phone while you are driving?”

Base: Adults who drive and have a cell phone

	Total	Generation			
		Echo Boomers (18-32)	Gen. X (34344)	Baby Boomers (45-63)	Matures (64+)
		%	%	%	%
Talk on Cell Phone While Driving (NET)	72	83	85	70	42
All the time	10	16	15	6	2
Sometimes	62	67	70	64	40
Never	28	17	15	30	58

TABLE 2
FREQUENCY OF SENDING OR RECEIVING TEXT MESSAGES ON CELL PHONE WHILE DRIVING

How often do you send or read texts on a cell phone while you are driving?”

Base: Those who drive and have a cell phone

	Total
	%
All the time	5
Sometimes	22
Never	74

TABLE 3
HOLD CELL PHONE OR USE HANDS-FREE DEVICE WHILE DRIVING - TREND

“When you use the cell phone while you are driving, do you typically hold the phone in your hand or do you use a hands-free device?”

Base: Adults who ever talk on a cell phone while driving

	2006	May 2007	Live in states that ban hand-held phone use
	%	%	%
Hold phone	72	66	49
Hands-free device	28	34	51

TABLE 4
FREQUENCY OF BEING PASSENGER WHILE DRIVER IS TALKING ON CELL PHONE - TREND

“How often are you a passenger in a car while the driver is talking on a cell phone?”

Base: All adults

	2006	May 2009
	%	%
Often	5	8
Sometimes	55	59
Never	39	31
Not Sure	1	2

**TABLE 5
LIVE IN CITY OR STATE THAT HAS LAW REQUIRING USE OF HANDS-FREE DEVICE - TREND**

“Do you currently live in a city or state that has a law requiring that you use a hands-free device while talking on a cell phone in your car or not?”

Base: All adults

	2006	May 2009
	%	%
My state requires a hands-free device if I am on my cell phone and driving	14	32
My state does not currently have such a law	61	49
Not sure	25	19

**TABLE 6
DANGEROUS TO USE CELL PHONE WHILE DRIVING - TREND**

“How dangerous is it for a driver to use a cell phone while driving?”

Base: All adults

	2006	May 2009	Those who use phones while driving
	%	%	%
Dangerous (NET)	82	88	88
Very dangerous	31	42	26
Dangerous	25	22	24
Somewhat Dangerous	26	24	33
Only Slightly or Not Dangerous (NET)	18	12	17
Slightly dangerous	16	11	16
Not dangerous at all	2	1	2

**TABLE 7
DANGEROUS TO USE CELL PHONE WHILE DRIVING – TREND**

“How dangerous is it for a driver to use a cell phone while driving?”

Base: All adults

	2006	May 2009
	%	%
Safer (NET)	70	71
Much safer	13	19
Somewhat safer	57	52
Just as safe	22	20
More dangerous (NET)	8	9
Somewhat more dangerous	6	7
Much more dangerous	2	2

Methodology

The Harris Poll was conducted online within the United States May 11 and 18, 2009, among 2,681 adults (aged 18 and over). Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region and household income were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, Harris Interactive avoids the words "margin of error" as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in Harris Interactive surveys. The data have been weighted to reflect the composition of the adult population. Because the sample is based on those who agreed to participate in the Harris Interactive panel, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.

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