

STEERING TEENS CLEAR OF

DANGER

Join Newspapers In Education as we learn valuable safety rules for the road from State Farm®. This 10-week program is designed to help teenagers prepare to be safe drivers and passengers and reduce the risk of accidents for everyone on the road. This program will continue in The Seattle Times through May 22.

Week Five: **DISTRACTED DRIVING — ELECTRONICS**

Don't be driven to distraction

The most common, tempting and deadly distraction for a teen behind the wheel is a cellphone. One in four American teen drivers admits to texting while driving, and 40 percent of 12- to 17-year-olds say they have been in a car where a teen driver used a cellphone in a dangerous way. Although teens and others may not realize it, any cellphone use — whether hand-held or hands-free — while driving is dangerous. In fact, researchers have found that it quadruples crash risk. Just the act of dialing a cellphone increases crash risk by three times.



Photo courtesy of Hoquiam High School

As of September 2010, eight states and the District of Columbia (D.C.) have banned driving while talking on a hand-held cellphone for all drivers, with five of these states making it a primary offense. Texting is banned for all drivers in 30 states and D.C. Many states also ban the use of cellphones, including hands-free, for novice teen drivers.

Texting

There's no reason to sugarcoat it: Texting while driving is a bad idea. A recent study from the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute (VTTI) shows that **texting while driving makes you 23.2 times more likely to be involved in a crash or near crash**. That's why many states have passed laws partially or completely banning texting while driving. More states are likely to follow.

Why should you think twice before using your cellphone while driving? "Studies show that driving while talking on a cellphone 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. Each year, it's estimated to cause:

- 636,000 crashes
- 2,600 deaths
- 330,000 injuries
- \$43 billion in damages
- 12,000 major injuries

Distracted driving in Washington state

How significant is the problem?

Between 2004 and 2008, distracted driving in Washington state contributed to 758 deaths, which is an average of 152 deaths per year. Distracted driving was involved in 25.8 percent (758 of 2,941) of all traffic deaths during the five-year period. Nearly 90 percent of distracted-driving-involved deaths were vehicle drivers and their passengers; another 9.8 percent were pedestrians. More than half (382 of 758; 50.5 percent) of distracted-driving-involved deaths occurred on Friday, Saturday or Sunday.

Could the reality be even worse?

Driver distraction in collision data collected by crash investigators is underreported. Often no evidence of distraction exists at the crash scene and drivers are reluctant to admit distraction played a role in the crash.

(Source: Washington Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS) year 2004 through 2008, Washington Traffic Safety Commission, Traffic Research & Data Center.)

<http://www.wtsc.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2010/08/distdrivingcrackcard.pdf>