



Consumer Alert

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Distracted Driving study shows drivers are talking on cell phones less, but “fiddling” with them more

BOISE, January 25, 2019 – Distracted driving continues to pose a dangerous and costly problem on U.S. roadways and cellphones are largely to blame. A 2018 distracted driving study by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety ([IIHS](http://www.iihs.org)) shows that talking on cellphones while behind the wheel has decreased, but drivers continue to interact with their phones in other ways.

The roadside observational study conducted in Northern Virginia revealed that drivers were 57 percent more likely to manipulate a cellphone (browsing the web, dialing, entering an address) in 2018 than drivers in 2014. Based on the study’s findings, IIHS estimates that manipulating a cellphone while driving was a contributing factor in more than 800 deaths nationwide in 2017.

The [Idaho Transportation Department](http://www.idahotransportation.com) reports that distracted driving contributed to almost 1 of every 3 fatal or serious injury crashes from 2010 to 2014.

“The cause-and-effect impact of distracted driving – and in particular, the use of mobile devices while driving – are evident in the data,” said Kenton Brine, NW Insurance

Council President. “Each tragic crash caused by distracted driving comes with other consequences as well, including higher insurance costs.”

Loss costs – payments made to treat injuries, repair damaged vehicles and property and defend insured drivers in legal action – have steadily increased. While individual companies weigh rating factors differently, loss costs are typically reflected in premiums paid by consumers.

“What we’re seeing, especially with more vehicles on the road traveling for work and leisure, is a rise in crash rates, and as the cost to treat injuries and repair vehicles increases, those crashes are having an impact on the cost of insurance,” said Kenton Brine, NW Insurance Council President.

According to the Washington Traffic Safety Commission ([WTSC](#)), it takes a driver 27 seconds to refocus on the road after using a smartphone while driving. At 25 mph, a vehicle can travel the length of three football fields, putting drivers, passengers, pedestrians and others at risk of a tragic crash.

Texting while driving is prohibited in Idaho and 46 other states and talking on a hand-held device while operating a motor vehicle is banned in 14 states. Even with those laws in place, distracted driving – spurred by increased interaction with smartphones – has become one of the most dangerous hazards on roadways today. Legislation to broaden Idaho’s texting ban failed to pass during the 2018 legislative session but will likely be considered by the Legislature again this year.

“Insurers strongly support laws that discourage drivers from engaging in unsafe practices while behind the wheel, and we believe it is time for Idaho’s driving laws to be updated, to prohibit all hand-held phone use while driving” Brine said.

All distractions are a reason for concern, but cell phone use – whether talking into a hand-held phone, texting, viewing screens or scrolling on apps while driving -- has been shown to be the riskiest distraction for drivers.

“We cannot stress it enough,” Brine said. “When you’re driving, keep your hands on the wheel and your eyes on the road.”

For more information about distracted driving or auto insurance, contact NW Insurance Council at 800-664-4942 or visit www.nwinsurance.org.

NW Insurance Council is a nonprofit, public-education and public policy organization funded by member insurance companies serving Washington, Oregon and Idaho.

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