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NATIONAL ROAD SAFETY
PARTNERSHIP
PROGRAM

Thought Leadership: Mobile phone use policy

AMTA
Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association

Mobile phone use policy

The Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association (AMTA) on behalf of its members, which include Telstra, Optus and Vodafone, promotes a policy of compliance with Australia's driving laws based on education and awareness and provides practical advice to drivers on how to minimise distraction risks.

Reducing crash risk

There are more than 31 million mobile voice and data services in operation in Australia, which is significantly more than the population of 23.8 million people. The mobile revolution has brought together the separate worlds of work, personal and social interactions into one space.

People have the capacity to do almost anything, anytime, anywhere through their connectivity. However, technology does not negate a driver's primary responsibility to comply with laws and adopt a safety-first approach when using smartphones.

Australian law requires drivers to have their mobile phone completely hands-free or mounted in a dock or cradle affixed to the car if they wish to talk on the phone while driving. These laws also allow for the use of Bluetooth and hands-free devices provided the driver doesn't touch the handset unless it is in a cradle.

AMTA acknowledges the distraction risks for drivers using mobiles, however, we believe that blanket messages that say "all distractions are bad" are ineffective and unrealistic. Drivers need to know the relative risks of various tasks and understand alternatives to reduce those risks.

The single most effective action drivers can take is to put their mobile phone in a cradle. They can also use Bluetooth or hands-free technology, single-button dialling or voice-activated calling in order to keep their eyes on the road ahead.

AMTA's top tips for safer driving and mobile phone use, which can be viewed at www.keepyoureyesontheroad.org.au, are:

- **Never Text:** It's not only illegal but very dangerous. Texting drivers have been shown to take their eyes off the road for 4.6 seconds over a 6-second interval. This means that at 60kph a driver is not watching the road for 75 metres or half the length of the MCG!

- **Always keep your eyes on the road:** The clear lesson from the latest research is that keeping your eyes on the road is critical in reducing driving risks from mobile phone use. Talking and listening on mobiles in light traffic and good driving conditions are not especially dangerous behaviours, but taking your eyes off the road to dial or answer is risky.

- **Buy, install and use a cradle for your phone:** The Australian Road Rules require drivers to place their mobiles in approved cradles affixed to the dashboard so they are looking at the road ahead and not glancing down. Drivers can also use a Bluetooth provided they do not touch their handset. Study the road rules for hands-free mobile use in your State or Territory.

- **Use your smartphone's features:** Smartphones provide voice-activated dialling and automatic answering features to reduce the effort of making and receiving a call and allow drivers' eyes to remain on the road at all times. You can install apps that limit a phone to calling and voice activation. Smart drivers use their handsets' technology to reduce driving distractions.

- **Don't automatically answer your mobile:** Hands-free mobile phone use in cars is legal in all Australian States and Territories. However, this does not mean it's appropriate for drivers to use them at all times. Drivers should not make or receive calls in heavy traffic, at intersections or in bad weather or poor road conditions. If a call is unnecessary or you consider it unsafe to answer at the time, do not answer the call. Let it divert to voicemail or an answering service.

What are the risks of mobile phone use in vehicles?

There is a large body of road safety research, which shows mobile phones are one of many distractions that drivers face on a daily basis.

The research varies in quality and significance from driver surveys carried out by motor insurance companies to driving simulator studies, police accident data and naturalistic research , which uses in-car cameras and sensors to assess real-world driving conditions.

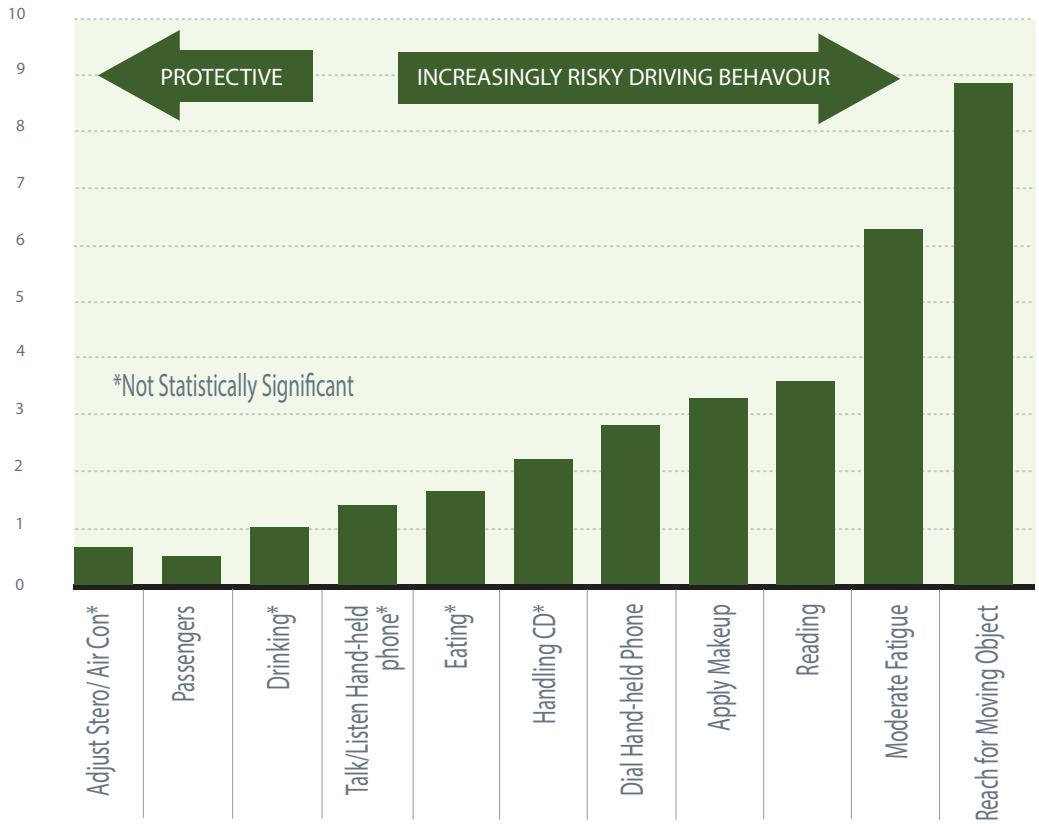
Naturalistic studies offer valuable insights into driving risks in real-world driving conditions and are considered the 'gold standard' for road safety research. Australia is conducting a major naturalistic study involving 400 cars.

The ground-breaking 100-Car Naturalistic Study closely analysed the everyday driving of 241 people for more than a year, resulting in 43,000 hours and 3,200,000 kilometres of driving data, undertaken by the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute (VTTI). It shows that the key to driver safety is to **keep your eyes on the road**.

The findings to date show that visually demanding tasks, which require a driver to look away from the road multiple times, such as texting, reaching for a loose phone in the car or dialling a phone, are the most dangerous.

For example, the VTTI found dialling a mobile while driving had a 2.8 times higher chance of a crash or near crash than non-distracted driving and reaching for a moving object, such as a phone, was 8.8 times riskier. This compared to a 3.1 times higher risk when some drivers applied makeup or a 3.4 times higher risk when they read something, such as a map or directions, when driving.

Relative Risk Estimate for Crash or Near Crash - Adult Drivers



Reaching for moving items and dialling are riskier tasks than talking on or listening to a hand-held mobile phone [i].

How can I best manage the risk of mobile phone use in fleet vehicles?

The VTTI studies show that the key difference between high risk and low-risk non-driving tasks involves the amount of visual distraction. Non-driving tasks associated with high visual attention have the highest odds of involvement in a safety-critical event.

The VTTI explained the importance of drivers keeping their eyes on the road:

*"These results show conclusively that a real key to significantly improving safety is **keeping your eyes on the road**. In contrast, "cognitively intense" tasks (e.g., emotional conversations, "books-on-tape", etc.) can have a measurable effect in the laboratory, but the actual driving risks are much lower in comparison."*

Therefore, the key to managing these risks is to focus on solutions that prevent the riskier tasks.

Would a total ban on mobiles remove risks?

Banning all mobile phone use – including hands-free - may encourage more dangerous activities in an attempt to avoid detection.

It is a common sight to see drivers at traffic lights with their heads bowed tapping away or dialling their mobile phone beneath window height on their lap to avoid detection from police.

A legal and far safer way to make a phone call in the car is to place your phone in a cradle affixed to the windscreen or dashboard at eye line level and to use the loudspeaker function or Bluetooth and hands-free devices.

Car cradles can be very inexpensive and when attached to the dashboard or windscreen can reduce risks associated with reaching for handsets and help minimise eye time off the road by getting the phone up to the eye line level with the road and within easy reach.

However, legal hands-free phone use is not appropriate in all road and traffic situations and drivers should not make calls in heavy traffic, at intersections or in bad weather or poor road conditions.

What about texting and social media?

The research on illegal texting while driving is clear – it is one of the most dangerous things a driver can do and studies have shown it can significantly increase the risk of having an accident.

CELL PHONE TASK	Risk of Crash or Near Crash event
Light Vehicle/Cars [ii]	
Dialling Cell Phone	2.8 times as high as non-distracted driving
Talking/Listening to Cell Phone	1.3 times as high as non-distracted driving
Reaching for object (i.e. electronic device and other)	1.4 times as high as non-distracted driving
Heavy Vehicles/Trucks [iii]	
Dialling Cell phone	5.9 times as high as non-distracted driving
Talking/Listening to Cell Phone	1.0 times as high as non-distracted driving
Use/Reach for electronic device	6.7 times as high as non-distracted driving
Text messaging	23.2 times as high as non-distracted driving

Naturalistic research has been able to tease out the riskier sub-tasks involved in distracted driving.

Taking your eyes off the road to dial a cell phone or look up an address and send a text increases the risk of crashing by 600 to 2,300 per cent," said Professor Tom Dingus, Director of the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute.

"Most of the [higher risk] tasks require multiple steps to complete and multiple glances away from the road," Professor Dingus said. "Listening and talking on cell phones while driving is not particularly risky."

"In contrast, the tasks that we should focus heavily on correcting are the less frequent and newer cell phone tasks of texting, typing, reading, dialling, and reaching for a phone."

Finally, he said the public needs to be informed of the relative risks of the various tasks that are commonly undertaken in a moving vehicle.

"Consumers will modify their behaviour if they understand the risks and have reasonable alternatives. In contrast, blanket messages that communicate that 'all distraction is bad' are ineffective and unrealistic," Professor Dingus said.

For more information see the mobile industry website keep your eyes on the road.

[i] Thomas A. Dingus, Ph.D., CHFP Director Virginia Tech Transportation Institute Newport News Shipbuilding Professor of Engineering Virginia Tech University, 'Naturalistic Driving Assessments of Driver Distraction and Fatigue' Keynote Address to the Australasian College of Road Safety, Melbourne, September 2011

[ii] Klauer, S. G., Dingus, T. A., Neale, V. L., Sudweeks, J.D., and Ramsey, D. J. (2006). 'The Impact on Driver Inattention on Near Crash/Crash Risk: An Analysis Using the 100 Car Naturalistic Driving Study Data' (Report No. DOT HS 810 594).Washington, DC: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

[iii] Olson,R.L., Hanowski,R.J., Hickman,J.S., Bocanegra,J. 2009. 'Driver distraction in commercial vehicle operations' (Report FMCSA-RRR-09-042)Washington, DC: US Department of Transportation