



Distracted Driving

May 2021

According to the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA), driver distraction is the diversion of attention from activities critical for safe driving to a competing activity. Not surprisingly, distracted driving increases the risk of getting into a crash. Studies have shown 71% of large truck crashes occurred when the driver was doing something besides driving the truck.

Distractions can come from both inside and outside of your truck cab. Distractions inside of your cab include talking on a cellphone, texting, using dispatching devices, eating, reading or adjusting the radio. Distractions outside of your cab can include looking at a passing building, billboard or person. One way to think about distraction is to ask yourself if something is drawing your attention and taking your eyes away from the road ahead of you. If the answer is yes, it's probably a distraction. The following are some tips developed by the agency to help you stay focused on the road ahead and make you a safer driver.

Tip #1: Stay focused on the road and not objects outside: A three year data collection effort by FMCSA and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration found an estimated 11,000 truck crashes nationwide involved distractions external to the truck cab. When driving, stay focused on the job of driving your truck. You should avoid focusing on things outside of your truck that aren't related to driving. Remember, anything taking your eyes away from driving is a distraction and can be dangerous. Paying attention only to things that are related to driving will help keep you aware of the road and cars around you and will help make sure you are ready to react to anything unexpected.

Tip #2: Never text and drive: Texting while driving is illegal for CMV drivers. While texting is an easy way to keep in touch with people, it can also be one of the most dangerous distractions in your truck. Texting takes your eyes, hands and mind off the job of driving. Studies show texting while driving increases a driver's chances of being involved in a safety-critical event by 23 times.

Tip #3: Avoid using a dispatching device while driving. Dispatching devices let you and your dispatchers communicate, navigate and help keep your logs updated. These devices are sometimes called mobile or portable data terminals and can help make your job easier. Although a message on the dispatching device might seem urgent, using a dispatching device while driving can be dangerous. This is because the dispatching device can take your eyes, hands and mind away from driving safely. Pull over to a safe location before checking messages or answering a call.

Tip #4: Keep your phone away. Cellphones involve multiple types of distractions and using them while driving is illegal for CMV drivers. Cellphones can take your eyes and hands away from driving. Dialing a phone while driving increased the risk of a crash or near-crash by 3 times, according to FMCSA.

Tip #5: Stay away from reading maps or notes. Printed directions, notes to yourself and maps are a normal part of your job. However, reading or writing while you are driving is a much bigger risk than you might think. Reading a map while driving increases your risk of being in a crash. This is because both reading and writing take your eyes off the road ahead of you. If you need to read something or write yourself a note, the safest thing to do is pull over. Never read (even a map) or write while you are driving.

Tip #6: Don't eat and drive. Sometimes you may feel like driving is the only time you have to eat or drink. But you may not realize that eating while driving can be dangerous. A recent study found that eating while driving was riskier than talking on a cellphone. Eating while driving can take your eyes off the road and requires you take at least one of your hands off the wheel. Always try to eat or drink before getting behind the wheel or leave time to pull over and eat.

Staying focused on driving can help keep you and others safe on the road!

The NPTC Monthly Driver Safety Letter, jointly sponsored by NPTC and [Centerline Drivers](#), is a Microsoft Word document that you can print out and post as is, if appropriate, or modify any way you wish to make it a better fit for your drivers, including adding your company logo. If you are already doing an in-house letter, you may find information here that you can cut and paste into your own letter. If you are interested in specific subjects, or have any comments/feedback, contact Tom Moore, CTP, at tmoore@nptc.org or (703)838-8898.