

# ★ ★ ★ ★ Safety Culture

## Cell Phones and Driving: Research Update

### The Problem:

- In the U.S. as of December 2007, 84% of the population or 255 million people were wireless telephone subscribers (CTIA-The Wireless Association).
  - These users spent 2.1 trillion minutes talking and sent 363 billion text messages in one year, showing a 300% increase in annual minutes compared to statistics from 2000.
- In 2007, an estimated 11% of drivers were using hand-held or hands-free phones while driving at any given daylight moment (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration).
- Two studies looking at the cell phone records of crashes-involved drivers have reported that phone use while driving is associated with approximately a quadrupling of crash risk.
- Studies using driving simulators have found that using a cell phone while driving significantly impairs several aspects of driving performance, especially reaction time.
- Although laws in several states prohibit hand-held cell phone use while driving while allowing hands-free use, the best available research suggests that using a hands-free phone while driving is no safer than using a hands-held phone.

### The Research:

- Two national telephone surveys:
  - The AAA Foundation's 2008 Traffic Safety Culture Index, a nationally-representative survey via landline and cellular telephone, in English and in Spanish, from October 25, 2007 through January 10, 2008, by NuStats, LLC, surveying a random sample of 2,509 U.S. adults ages 18 and older about a variety of major traffic safety issues, including cell phone use while driving.
  - Opinion Research Corporation's CARAVAN®, a cost-shared omnibus survey of adults ages 18 and older living in private households in the continental U.S. 2,009 CARAVAN interviews conducted from September 4 through September 8, 2008 included questions paid for by the AAA Foundation about cell phone use while driving as well as opinions of the safety of hands-free cell phones while driving compared with hand-held cell phones.

Car crashes rank among the leading causes of death in the United States.



## Key Findings:

- Both surveys found that more than half of all drivers admitted talking on a cell phone while driving in the past 30 days. Specifically:
  - The TSC Index survey found 53% of drivers admitted having talked on a cell phone while driving and 17% admitted doing it often or very often.
  - The CARAVAN omnibus survey found 61% had talked on the phone while driving with 16% confessing to engaging in the behavior regularly.
  - Both surveys found that younger drivers were somewhat more likely to talk on cell phones while driving. For example, in the TSC Index, two out of three respondents aged 18 to 34 reported using cell phones while driving, as compared to 53% of drivers aged 45 to 54 and 32% of drivers aged 55 and older.
- Respondents from both surveys were asked how often they read or sent text messages while driving in past 30 days. The surveys showed that 14% and 17% respectively admitted text messaging while driving in the past 30 days; both surveys found that 3% of drivers reported doing it regularly. Both surveys found that younger drivers were overwhelmingly more likely than mature drivers to text message. For example, nearly half of drivers aged 18 to 24 admitted text messaging while driving in the TSC Index, compared to 27% of those aged 25 to 34 and fewer than 5% of those over age 45.
- The TSC Index found 83% of drivers felt that drivers using cell phone was a serious problem, but 46% of those same drivers also admitted to using a cell phone while driving.
- The CARAVAN omnibus survey found 2 out of 3 drivers think that using a hands-free cell phone while driving is safer than using a hand-held phone.