

## **Distracted Driving Summit Goes Live Web**

**Date:** September 30, 2009

The images are chilling. A young woman drives down a sunny road. She momentarily turns her attention to her cell phone and texts “C U 2 Nite.” Suddenly, a squeal of brakes is heard, followed by the thunderous slam of metal into metal as she violently smashes into the bumper of another car. Then the screen is dark, and the words “Distracted Drivers Are Dangerous” appear.

The source of this frightening scene is a [TAC safety TV ad](#). Some, like a [public service announcement](#) by the Department of Transportation, take a more jovial approach. But the message is the same – and these ads come just as a [national live web summit](#) on distracted driving kicks off on September 30, 2009.

The news media has chimed in as well. The AP posted a video on YouTube spotlighting a woman who lost her mother in an accident involving a 20-year-old on the cell phone. The New York Times published a news story about turning the vehicle into a mobile office – and a dangerous one at that.

The risks of driving while distracted are thoroughly documented. According to [AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety](#), using a cell phone while driving quadruples the risk of a crash. Driver inattention is a factor in more than a million traffic accidents in the U.S. each year, with consequences from serious injury to death, as well as an economic impact of nearly \$40 billion annually.

Despite the risks, the AAA Foundation reports that drivers spend more than half their time on the road distracted by secondary tasks. And, although 95% of drivers are aware of the risks of texting while driving, 18% of these same people either sent or read one or more text messages in the past month.

In Oregon, a new law is taking aim at the problem. With the recent passage of [HB 2377](#), our state will become the seventh in the nation to enact a ban on using a handheld cell phone while driving. The new law, which will take effect on January 1, 2010, also prohibits texting. According to [a report on cell phone laws](#), Oregon will enforce the law as “primary,” rather than “secondary.” Under a secondary law, a police officer needs another reason to stop a vehicle before he or she can issue a citation. Because Oregon’s law will be primary, an officer observing hands-free cell phone use will be able to pull over the driver on that basis alone.

Although the new law focuses on cell phone usage, distractions can result from many other factors. The [NHTSA](#) lists 14 types of distractions, only two of which involve phones. Potential distractions for drivers include: passengers, especially children; moving objects in the vehicle; adjusting the temperature, radio, cassette, or CD player; using various devices; and eating or drinking. Handheld mobile phone use, however may be more dangerous than some other activities, with the agency terming cell phone use a “moderate” or “complex” secondary task, as opposed to simpler ones.

[The NHTSA's September 2009 study](#), which examines statistics from a number of databases, lists the following conclusions:

- Driver distraction was a factor in 16% of all fatal crashes in 2008, and in 22% of injury crashes.
- In crashes where driver error was a primary factor, 18% involved distraction.
- Distraction also contributed to close calls, factoring into almost a quarter of crashes *and* near-crashes.

The Distracted Driving Summit, which is being hosted by the Research and Innovative Technology Administration, is scheduled for September 30 – October 1, 2009. The summit will include panels on driver distraction and inattention, research on risks, technology, legislation, and other topics. The opening address was given by U.S. Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood. The summit may be [viewed on the Internet](#).