

## Cognitive distraction measured in new study

Written by Australian Business

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September 12, 2013 /**24-7PressRelease**/ -- Many states, including New York, have made it illegal for drivers to use portable electronic devices such as cellphones, laptops, pagers, games or tablets while they are behind the wheel. The current belief is that hands-free devices are safer and reduce the risk of a driver becoming involved in a [car accident](#).

In response to a call for hands-free technology, many new cars are now equipped with built-in devices that allow the driver to use their voice to make phone calls or to send texts and emails. However, the question rises over how safe these built-in devices are for drivers to use while the car is in motion.

### More information needed

Federal agencies list cognitive, or mind, distraction, as one of three types of [distraction](#) that can put drivers at risk of causing a collision. Texting and driving is considered the most dangerous behavior for drivers because it encourages the person to engage in all three types of distraction. However, many drivers may have had the experience of being distracted while simply talking with another person in the car with them. Vocal conversations do not require any visual or physical participation but have been found to be the cause of crashes resulting in serious injury or death.

While a great deal of research has been conducted in regards to the risks associated with drivers taking their eyes off of the road in front of them, or removing their hands from the steering wheel, hardly any research has been previously conducted on mind distraction.

### Measuring cognitive distraction

A new study was recently conducted by the American Automobile Association Foundation for Traffic Safety that focused on measuring cognitive distraction in drivers. According to USA Today, 150 drivers were involved in the study, which analyzed the effects that six activities have on the brain while driving. These activities were:- Talking with a passenger- Using a speech-to-text email system- Listening to an audiobook- Talking on a handheld phone- Listening to the radio- Talking on a hands-free phone

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Three experiments were used to measure the amount of distraction that each activity caused on the brain and to create a starting point, researchers measured the brain function of drivers whose sole focus was on driving.

The study revealed that hands-free devices can be just as distracting as holding a cell phone or other hand-held device. Drivers were found to miss cues that served to alert them to a potentially dangerous situation. One experiment found that more complex tasks reduced the amount of visual scanning that a driver performed. Braking time was also found to be impacted when driver's minds were occupied on another task.

Auto manufacturers and technology companies may want to consider cognitive distraction as they develop and install new technology features for drivers to interact with. If you have been injured by a distracted driver, you should discuss your legal rights with a qualified attorney.

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