September 27, 2013 /**24-7PressRelease**/ -- Driving around Providence County, it is common to see drivers chatting on their cellphones. For the last few years Rhode Island lawmakers have rejected the idea of putting a ban on the device while behind the wheel of a car. This year, Sen. V. Susan Sosnowski introduced another bill, according to Providence Journal, but the bill was put on hold by the Senate Judiciary Committee. The state's legislative report shows that it is still in that status.

The role of distraction in crashes

Rhode Island does not track the role of distraction in car accidents , according to the Department of Health. Distraction.gov reports that over 3300 people died in crashes during 2011 which were caused by a distracted driver and distraction was listed as a factor in 10 percent of crashes. Distraction occurs when drivers engage in an activity that takes their hand off of the steering wheel, their eyes off of the road or their minds off of what they should be focusing on.

Texting is considered the most dangerous behavior because it uses all three types of distraction. Rhode Island banned the use of texting but lawmakers who are balking at passing a state ban for regular drivers using cellphones may want to look at the results of a recent study.

Measuring cognitive distraction

The American Automobile Association Foundation for Traffic Safety conducted a study in Utah that looked specifically at how drivers are affected by cognitive distractions. The study incorporated three different experiments - laboratory, driving simulator and instrumented vehicle - to measure cognitive workload. In order to determine the level of cognitive distraction, the researchers first measured brainwaves of drivers who were entirely focused on the task of driving.

Once they had those results, the participants were asked to drive while engaging in one of the following tasks:- Listening to an audiobook- Listening to a radio- Talking with passenger- Talking on a hand-held phone- Talking on a hands-free phone- Using a speech-to-text email system

As study participants engaged in each activity separately, their brainwaves were measured and sensor equipment measured their brake reaction time, missed cues, following distance and peripheral light detection. The study is the first of its kind to be done, regarding cognitive distraction.

Hands-free tasks still create risk

The study showed that while listening to the radio or an audiobook decreased driver attention, the more complicated the non-driving task became, the less the driver was focusing on the task of driving, itself. Drivers were found to miss visual cues, putting themselves in danger of getting into an accident, brake times slowed significantly and drivers failed to scan the road and environment as frequently, putting them at risk of being taken by surprise by an unexpected event, such as a cat entering the road or a car approaching at a faster speed.

The study results also showed that, unlike popular belief, hands-free devices do not lower the risk of distraction, proving that the best prevention to avoiding a collision is to turn off the cellphone and eliminate complicated tasks while driving.

If you have been injured in a car accident involving a driver on a cellphone, you should contact an experienced attorney to discuss your case.

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