

Distracted Driving, Consequences and Solutions Jacob Lewis

In 1891, as James Lambert was testing the first single cylinder gasoline vehicle, he hit a small obstruction in the roadway which caused his vehicle to careen out of control into a nearby hitching post. The first automobile accident had occurred, and was caused by a distracted driver! Today, distracted driving has remained basically unchanged in cause and nature. In thinking through the numerous activities and tasks which occupy one's time, motorists can very easily forget some of the basic tenets of safe driving. This in turn can place the distracted individual and everyone within the vicinity at serious risk of injury, or even death. Distracted driving has been an issue since the beginning of the automobile's history in the US. Though no one was killed in the accident, the damage to Mr. Lambert's valuable invention could have been easily avoided had he paid better attention to obstacles in the road. The sense of responsibility and alertness that could have prevented an accident then, could very well be the key to preventing future tragedies.

While on the road, we face many distractions. Things like a beautiful sunrise, an incoming call from a business partner, or a song that touches the soul playing on the radio can all claim segments of our consciousness. These seemingly simple sights and sounds detract from our awareness in subtle ways at first. One may ask, "what is the harm in answering a phone call if I'm still keeping an eye on the road?" We all know the dangers of texting and driving, but few people are willing to recognize that holding an involved conversation, even with someone sitting in the passenger seat of the vehicle, can put enormous demands on the focus of the driver. When attempting a task like threading a needle, shooting billiards, or

simply contemplating a chess game, most people will demand complete silence. In these situations, the task is deemed important enough that any breach of focus would result in failure. Why then, do we find that so many drivers who have been involved in collisions or accidents believed that it would be perfectly fine to glance at their cell phone, or adjust a tie in an incorrectly angled rearview mirror? The simple conclusion is that most people take the responsibility of automobility for granted.

The free exchange of goods, services, and even knowledge relies on our use of vehicles every day. The ability to travel hundreds of miles in a day is an incredible necessity for many, but with every powerful tool come major responsibilities. While behind the wheel, there is a single task to be accomplished: safely directing the vehicle to the destination. In order to prevent future accidents, people must be made aware of the deep value and responsibility of operating a motor vehicle. There are many ways to communicate this important message with the populous. My approach to the issue involves two specific areas of engagement: the beginning driver and the legal system. First, it is important to fully educate each and every person passing through our nation's "driver's ed" programs. Beginning drivers need to understand that every time they get into a vehicle, they take control of one of the two-hundred seventy million cars that traverse our congested highways. These cars, through various accidents, will kill more people than guns each year (Violence Policy Center, 2017). Second, measures must be taken to more thoroughly penalize drivers for accidents and damages caused by distracted driving. Steps must be taken to ensure that even if a driver has no regard for the safety of others, they will still dread the legal repercussions of their poor decisions.

Safe, responsible driving is something we owe not only to ourselves, but to the community around us, and those that made motor travel possible. Our way of life in the United States is due in part to the work of talented inventors, who invisioned safe, efficient transportation for all. An invitation is extended to everyone to get behind the wheel and enjoy the freedom of vehicular travel, but when this gift is taken for granted, families can be forever scarred by financial burden, or even the loss of a loved one. My message for beginning drivers would be to use the freedom they have been given to chase their dreams, but remember to be careful of others doing the same.

Reference: "Gun Deaths vs Vehicle Deaths in the US" 2017, VPC <http://www.vpc.org/regulating-the-gun-industry/gun-deaths-compared-to-motor-vehicle-deaths/>