

# Driver Safety Letter

presented by



## ***Distracted Driving***

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According to the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, driver distraction is the diversion of attention from activities critical for safe driving to a competing activity. We know that distracted driving increases the risk of getting into a crash. A 2009 study found that 71% of large-truck crashes occurred when the truck driver was doing something besides driving the truck.

Distractions can come from both inside and outside of your truck cab. Distractions inside of your cab can include dialing cell phones, texting, using dispatching devices, eating, reading, or adjusting the radio. Distractions outside of your cab can include looking at a passing building, billboard, or person. One way to think about distraction is to ask yourself if something is drawing your attention and taking your eyes away from the road ahead of you. If the answer is "yes," it is probably a distraction.

Following are some tips developed by the agency that will help you stay focused on the road ahead and can help make you a safer driver.

**TIP #1: Do Not Let Objects Outside of Your Truck Distract You. Did You Know?** A three-year data collection effort by FMCSA and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration found that an estimated 11,000 truck crashes nationwide involved distractions external to the truck cab. When driving, stay focused on the job of driving your truck. You should avoid focusing on things outside of your truck that aren't related to driving. This includes things like billboards, buildings, and people. Remember, anything taking your eyes away from driving is a distraction and can be dangerous. Paying attention only to things that are related to driving will help keep you aware of the road and cars around you, and will help make sure you are ready to react to anything unexpected.

**TIP #2: Do Not Text While Driving.** Texting while driving is illegal for CMV drivers. While texting is an easy way to keep in touch with people, it can also be one of the most dangerous distractions in your truck. Texting takes your eyes, hands, and mind off the job of driving. In order to read or send a text message, you must look at the phone. This takes your eyes off the road. You must use the buttons on the phone to open or write a message, which takes at least one hand off the steering wheel. You must read or think about what you are going to write, which takes your mind off the road.

A 2009 study of real-world driving found that text messaging while driving increased a driver's chances of being involved in a safety-critical event by 23 times. This study found that, in the moments before a safety-critical event, drivers who were texting while driving spent nearly 5 seconds looking at their phone. If you are driving at 55 mph and take your eyes off the road for 5 seconds to write a text message, you have traveled the length of a football field (end zones included) without looking at the road.

**TIP #3: Do Not Use a Dispatching Device While Driving.** Dispatching devices let you and your dispatchers communicate, can help you navigate, and can help keep your logs. These devices are sometimes called mobile or portable data terminals and can help make your job easier. Although a message on the dispatching device might seem urgent, using a dispatching device while driving can be dangerous. This is because the dispatching device can take your eyes, hands, and mind away from driving safely.

In fact, a 2009 study of real-world driving found that using a dispatching device while driving increased a driver's chances of being involved in a safety-critical event by 9 times.

**TIP #4: Do Not Dial a Handheld Phone While Driving.** Handheld cell phones involve multiple types of distractions and using them while driving is illegal for CMV drivers. Handheld phones can take your eyes and hands away from driving. A 2010 study of real-world driving found that dialing a handheld cell phone while driving increased the risk of a crash or near-crash by 3 times.

Dialing a handheld cell phone requires you to take your eyes off the road and your hands off the wheel. If you have to make a call while driving, find a safe place to stop and keep your call short. Or, consider a voice-activated hands-free phone or phone app. Phones that do not require you to hold them while dialing a number or talking can help keep your eyes on the road and your hands on the wheel. Most smartphones either have this hands-free ability or have apps available to provide it.

**TIP #5: Do Not Read, Write, or Use Paper Maps While Driving.** Printed directions, notes to yourself, and maps are a normal part of your job. However, reading or writing while you are driving is a much bigger risk than you might think. Reading a map while driving increases your risk of being in a crash. This is because both reading and writing take your eyes off the road ahead of you. If you need to read something or write yourself a note, the safest thing to do is pull over. Never read, even a map, or write while you are driving.

A 2009 study of real-world driving found that writing while driving increased a driver's chance of being involved in a safety-critical event by 8 times. The study also found that reading a map while driving increased the chances of being in a safety-critical event by 7 times.

**TIP #6: Avoid Eating and Drinking When Driving.** Sometimes you may feel like driving is the only time you have to eat or drink. But you may not realize that eating while driving can be dangerous. A recent study found that eating while driving was riskier than talking on a cell phone. Eating while driving can take your eyes off the road. It always takes at least one of your hands off the wheel. Always try to eat or drink before getting behind the wheel or leave time to pull over and eat.

Staying focused on driving can help keep you, and other road users, safe on the road!



FOCUS...ADJUST... CORRECT... TALK!

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