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- 3 Subject Matter Expert for Distracted Driving
- 4 Passionate about saving lives

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**Understanding Distracted Driving: Data, Laws, and Lives**

Melissa Ostergaard, MPH

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**Disclosures**

The speaker has no disclosures.

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**Learning Objectives**

- 1 Define distracted driving and its various forms
- 2 Know your state laws regarding distracted driving.
- 3 Understand current data and trends in distracted driving incidents
- 4 Learn effective techniques and tools for enforcement
- 5 Identify and participate in national/state distracted driving campaigns
- 6 Recognize the human impact through a real victim story

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**Definition**

Driver distraction is *anything* that can take visual, manual or cognitive resources away from the driving task.

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**Types of Distraction**

**Visual**  
Eyes off the road

**Manual**  
Hands off the wheel

**Cognitive**  
Mind off the driving task

Texting while driving uses all three types of distraction

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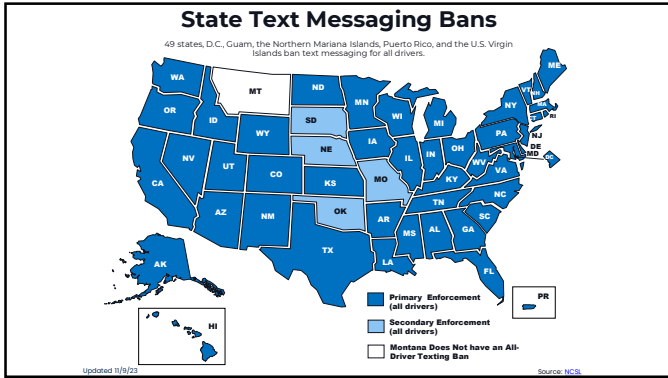
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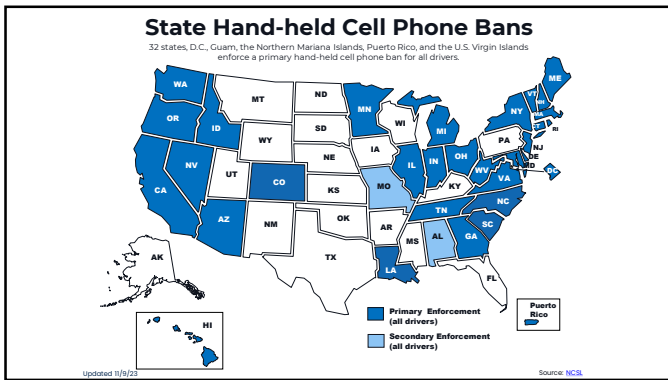
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### Legislative Activity

State	What's happening / new law
Iowa	New "hands-free" driving law signed (SF 22)
Colorado	Comprehensive ban on handheld mobile device use (unless hands-free)
South Carolina	"Hands-Free and Distracted Driving Act" signed
Pennsylvania	"Paul Miller's Law" — no handheld devices while driving, even when stopped
Florida	Proposed expansion from texting-only to all handheld devices
New York	Legislative recognition / awareness, enforcement campaigns
Others / general	Various states seeing uptake of hands-free laws / bans

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**Law Enforcement's Role**

- ✓ Enforces distracted driving laws through stops, citations, and warnings
- ✓ Educates the public via outreach and campaigns
- ✓ Collects critical data for crashes and enforcement trends
- ✓ Helps shape policy by reporting enforcement challenges and supporting legislation
- ✓ Faces real constraints that affect enforcement consistency (from law clarity to public perception)

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**Federal Government's Role**

- ✓ Sets the tone and priorities through research, national campaigns, and funding
- ✓ Supports states via grants, technical assistance, and model policies
- ✓ Directly regulates commercial drivers and employers
- ✓ Investigates crashes and pushes for systemic improvements
- ✗ Does NOT create or enforce distracted driving laws for the general public: that's up to each state legislature and law enforcement agency

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**What does the data tell us?**

**Fatality Data**

- **8% of fatal crashes** and **13% of injury crashes** were distraction-related.
- **3,275 deaths** and **324,819 injuries** involved distracted drivers.
- **5% of drivers** in fatal crashes were distracted; **7% among drivers aged 15-20** — the highest of any age group.
- **611 nonoccupants** (pedestrians, cyclists, etc.) were killed in distraction related crashes.

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### What does the research tell us?

- Distracted Driving is **underreported**
- **Young drivers** are disproportionately affected
- Phone use while driving remains **widespread**
- **Hands Free Laws** are making a difference
- **Enforcement and Awareness Campaigns** work best together
- **Commercial Drivers** face higher risks and stricter rules



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### What doesn't the data tell us?

Category	What's Missing	Why It Matters
Crash data	True incidence of distraction	Many distraction-related crashes go unrecorded as such
Enforcement data	How often, how equitably laws are enforced	Some laws exist only on paper if not enforced
Officer perspective	Willingness, training, risk perception	Enforcement depends on more than just law: it requires buy-in
Behavioral data	Public attitudes, actual behavior	Needed to shape effective awareness campaigns
Tech integration	Role of in-car systems, employer policies	Distraction is evolving beyond just texting



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**Distracted driving isn't just a statistic — it's stories like these.**



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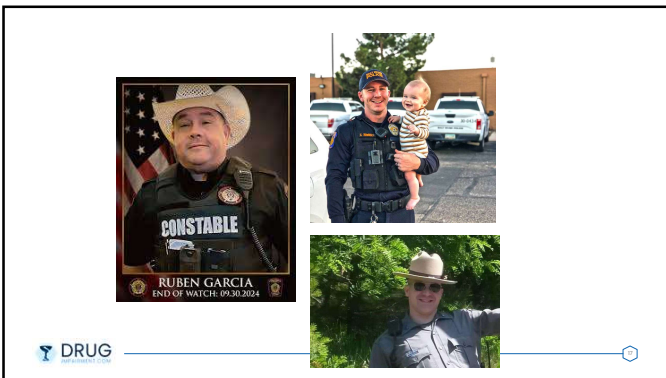
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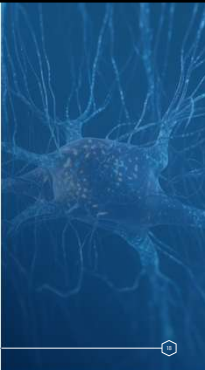
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**Behavioral Cues**

- Swerving or drifting between lanes.
- Failure to maintain consistent speed or stopping well before a stop line.
- Delayed reaction to traffic signals (e.g., sitting at green light).
- Frequent head-down posture or visible interaction with a device.
- "Zoning out" behavior, such as inattention to surroundings or erratic lane changes.



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**In-Vehicle Observations**

- Visible phone use through windshield or side windows (especially texting or scrolling).
- Head movement patterns consistent with looking down repeatedly.
- Use of reflective surfaces to identify screen glare or hand motion in the driver's lap.
- Passengers pointing out or reacting to the driver's distraction (especially with rideshare or teens).

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**Use of Technology**

- High Vantage Patrols: Officers in SUVs or trucks can observe behavior from above, making it easier to see into vehicles.
- Unmarked or "Ghost" Vehicles: Used to blend in with traffic and identify offenders unaware of being watched.
- Spotting Operations: One officer identifies distracted drivers and radios ahead to units that initiate the stop.

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**Issuing Citations**

- **Challenges**
  - Proving handheld phone use if the screen isn't clearly visible.
  - Drivers may drop their phones before the stop, making it harder to establish probable cause.
  - Some jurisdictions allow "hands-free" use, complicating enforcement.
- **Officer Discretion**
  - Officers may opt for education over citation in minor or first-time cases.
  - Discretion may be used in cases where the distraction wasn't tech-based (e.g., eating, adjusting GPS).
  - Consistency is key

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### Roadside Safety During Traffic Stops

<p><b>Location</b> Always choose a safe location for the stop. Avoid blind curves or narrow shoulders.</p>	<p><b>Position</b> Position the patrol vehicle at an angle with wheels turned outward to shield the officer.</p>
<p><b>Be Alert</b> Be alert for signs the driver is still distracted or may not be fully aware of surroundings.</p>	<p><b>Consider Back Up</b> Consider backup when stopping a vehicle in a high-traffic area or during nighttime conditions.</p>

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### Using Data to Determine High-Risk Areas

- Identify "hot spots" for distracted driving
- Collaborate with traffic engineers
- Use community and citizen reports
- Coordinate with schools, colleges, and businesses
- Partner with public safety campaigns

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### Legal Concerns

<b>Privacy and Search</b>	<b>Probable Cause</b>	<b>Evidence Collection</b>
Rather than relying on phone data, which requires consent or a warrant, focus on directly observed behavior	Focus on articulable facts: what the officer saw that led to the belief the driver was distracted. Dash/body cam footage can support these claims in court.	Take detailed notes: vehicle behavior, driver posture, hand movement, time of day, traffic conditions.
<b>Observed Behavior</b>	<b>Articulate Facts</b>	<b>Detailed Notes</b>

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## National Campaign Overview

**Campaigns**

**Distracted Driving Awareness Month (April):** Annual event promoting distracted driving prevention

**Put the Phone Away or Pay (NHTSA):** Focuses on enforcement and high-visibility education; Use of digital ads, TV spots, and roadside messaging

**TrafficSafetyMarketing.gov**

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## State-Level Campaigns

**State-Level Initiatives**

**Buckle Up Phone Down (Missouri):** Encourages seatbelt use and phone-free driving

**Hands Free Tennessee (Tennessee):** Targets distracted driving and creates awareness for the hands-free law

**Be DeLAWARE (Delaware):** Play on "aware" for local distracted driving awareness

**Talk. Text. Crash. (Texas):** Public education & law enforcement partnership




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## Community Engagement Opportunities

**Engaging the Community**

- School Presentations:** Interactive sessions, driving simulators, student pledges
- Traffic Stops:** Distribution of flyers, visual reminders, citations
- Partnerships with Local Organizations:**
  - Hospitals, insurance companies, schools, driver's ed programs
  - Collaborative events during awareness month



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**Tools for Effective Outreach**

**Engaging the Community**

- **PSA Toolkits:** Scripts, talking points, press release templates
- **Social Media Graphics:** For agency Facebook, Twitter, Instagram
- **Educational Handouts & Banners:** For schools, community events
- **Training Modules:** Briefings for officers on current laws & messaging

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**Final Thoughts & Call to Action**



- Staying Vigilant, Saving Lives
- Distracted driving is preventable
- Campaigns + enforcement + education = effective deterrent
- Let's commit to spreading awareness and modeling safe driving behavior

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**Be the reason someone gets home safe.**

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**Which of the following are a type of distraction?**

- A. Tactile
- B. Visual
- C. Sensory
- D. Imaginary

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**ANSWER: B**

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**True or False: The federal government passes and enforces nationwide distracted driving laws.**

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**ANSWER: False**

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**Which of the following is important to see effective behavior change?**

- A. Improved Technology**
- B. Policy/Legislation**
- C. Shifting Public Norms**
- D. All of the above**

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**ANSWER: D**

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**True or False:** Younger drivers remain the most at-risk group to be injured in a Distraction-related crash.



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**ANSWER:** True



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CONTACT ME

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