

Dept. of Transportation: ‘Every second matters’: Driving distractions on the rise

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April Law of the Month emphasizes dangers of distracted driving

When a driver takes their attention off their most important task, they put themselves and others at risk.

Distracted driving is a growing problem on Wisconsin roads. More than 10,000 crashes involved distracted driving last year, up more than 13% from 2020.

Cell phone use is one of the most common forms of distracted driving, but any interruption that takes your eyes and mind off the road can be a distraction. That includes use of a navigation system or other device, eating, personal care, and even passengers or pets.

Texting while driving is dangerous and illegal in Wisconsin. No text, email, or social media post is worth a crash, injury, or death.

“It takes just a moment for traffic conditions to change. That means every second matters on the roads,” Wisconsin State Patrol Superintendent Anthony Burrell said. “Taking your eyes off the road can change a life in an instant.”

Distracted driving can have deadly consequences. Fatalities connected with distracted driving have been rising in recent years. 26 people were killed in 2019, 31 in 2020 and preliminary numbers show 40 people died in distracted driving crashes in 2021.

Wisconsin statutes ([346.89](#)) that address distracted driving include:

- Inattentive driving is prohibited; any activity that interferes with the ability to drive safely
- A ban on cell phone use by probationary license holders
- A hand-held ban for all drivers in work zones, emergency, and roadside response areas
- A texting ban for all drivers
- Using devices for visual entertainment is prohibited for drivers

All drivers are at risk of distracted driving crashes. In 2019, 72% of Wisconsin drivers involved in distracted driving crashes were older than 25.

Texting is one of the most dangerous distractions. Sending or reading a text takes your eyes off the road for five seconds. At 55 miles per hour, that's like driving the length of an entire football field with your eyes closed.

Drivers are urged to put their phones away when behind the wheel. If you need to text, pull over and stop the vehicle.

“Make a commitment to stop distracted driving. Always buckle up and put the phone down while driving. Every trip. Every time,” Superintendent Burrell said.

Everyone can demonstrate their commitment to safe driving by [taking the Buckle Up Phone Down pledge today on the WisDOT website](#).