

Keep your eyes on the road and your mind focused on driving

Commercial fleet safety: Distractions and Inattention

Most drivers agree that many accidents are the result of one or more drivers not paying full attention to their driving duties. Lack of attention results in the driver not being able to respond appropriately to changing driving conditions.

Driver inattention often falls into the following categories:

- Taking your eyes off the roadway ahead
- Performing secondary tasks
- Daydreaming
- Fatigue

Glances away from the roadway ahead should be less than 2 seconds, preferably less than 1.5 seconds.

Taking eyes off the roadway ahead

Part of the allure of driving is the ability to see parts of the country and the interesting activities along the way. While this can be alluring, it can also result in an accident if the driver takes his or her eyes off the roadway ahead for long periods of time. Drivers should limit sightseeing and stay focused on the roadway ahead—no matter how interesting things look.

Checking mirrors and blind spots is a critical safety practice that drivers should do regularly. But this practice takes a driver's eyes off the roadway ahead. To remain safe, it must be done quickly so as to minimize the amount of time your eyes are away from the roadway ahead.

A National Highway Traffic Safety Administration study¹ found drivers should limit their mirror and blind-spot scanning to less than two seconds, ideally 1.5 seconds or less. Taking your eyes away from the roadway ahead for more than two seconds greatly increases your crash risk. Drivers should develop a regular scanning pattern that includes viewing left and right mirrors and blind spots—always scanning ahead before moving to the next spot. Make sure not to move your eyes away from the roadway ahead for more than 2 seconds, preferably less than 1.5 seconds.

There are situations when a driver must look away from the roadway in performing their general driving duties, such as looking for a building address. In these cases, the driver should increase his or her following distance and limit their searches to less than 2 seconds.

Secondary tasks

Performing secondary tasks, such as reading a map or pushing buttons on a cellphone, divert your eyes and mind away from your driving duties, often for several seconds. A Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration study² on distracted driving among truck drivers found, not surprisingly, that performing secondary tasks greatly increases your crash risk.

It found that your crash risk increases by:

- 4 times while reading
- 6 times while dialing a cellphone
- 7 times while looking at a map
- 9 times while writing
- 10 times while interacting with a dispatch device
- 10 times while performing complex activities such as cleaning a side mirror or rummaging through a bag
- 23 times while texting.

All these distracting tasks are within the driver's control to limit or eliminate altogether.

With an increased crash rate of 23 times normal, it is understandable why the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration banned texting in commercial motor vehicles. The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration has also banned hand-held cellphone use for commercial motor vehicle drivers. Both rules establish significant fines for violations and disqualify drivers after multiple offenses. Why are all these activities so hazardous? Because they distract a driver for long periods of time, often for 4 or more seconds. While 4 seconds does not seem like a long time, a truck traveling at 60 miles per hour can travel 352 feet — or more than the length of a football field — in 4 seconds.

Driving while distracted is like driving blind; a lot of hazardous situations can develop while distracted. Secondary tasks should not be performed while driving. They should be performed while safely parked.

Daydreaming

Daydreaming is also a form of driver inattention. Drivers spend so much time on the road it's not surprising that they periodically begin daydreaming. While daydreaming, the driver's eyes may be seeing what is happening but the mind is not processing the information. How many times have you snapped-to on the roadway, not remembering the last couple of miles? If you find your mind wandering, quickly refocus on the driving situation — scanning, anticipating and adjusting to the traffic around you.



Fatigue

Drivers understand that driving while severely fatigued can be dangerous, but moderate drowsiness can also impact a driver's ability to recognize and respond to hazards. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration³ has found that driving while moderately or severely drowsy increases your crash risk by nearly 6 times. Drowsy driving can occur during the day as well as at night. Drivers who become drowsy should immediately find a safe place to park and get adequate rest.



Providing solutions to help our members manage risk.SM

For your risk management and safety needs, contact Nationwide Loss Control Services at 1-866-808-2101 or LCS@nationwide.com.

¹ "Distraction in Commercial Trucks and Buses: Assessing Prevalence and Risk in Conjunction with Crashes and Near-Crashes" (Document No. FMCSA-RRR-10-049), Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (September 2010).

² "Driver Distraction in Commercial Vehicle Operations" (Document No. FMCSA-RRR-09-042), Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (September 2009).

³ "The 100-Car Naturalistic Driving Study: Phase II — Results of the 100-Car Field Experiment (Document No. DOT HS 810 593), National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (April 2006).

The information used to create this brochure was obtained from sources believed to be reliable to help users address their own risk management and insurance needs. It does not and is not intended to provide legal advice. Nationwide, its affiliates and employees do not guarantee improved results based upon the information contained herein and assume no liability in connection with the information or the provided suggestions. The recommendations provided are general in nature; unique circumstances may not warrant or require implementation of some or all of the suggestions. Products are underwritten by Nationwide Mutual Insurance Company and affiliated companies, Columbus, Ohio, and are subject to underwriting guidelines, review and approval. Nationwide and the Nationwide N and Eagle are service marks of Nationwide Mutual Insurance Company. © 2023 Nationwide ESO-0466AO.1 (07/23)

