



Medical Student Section Issue Brief: The dangers of text messaging while driving

Introduction

At the American Medical Association – Medical Student Section (AMA-MSS) Interim 2009 meeting, Resolution 33 was passed. The resolution, entitled “*Prohibiting Text Messaging While Driving*” read as follows:

RESOLVED, That our AMA-MSS encourage chapters to take advantage of current funding sources for community service initiatives to promote the dangers of text messaging while driving and to conduct events in their communities on safety education for all drivers.

About Text Messaging While Driving

Mobile technology is ubiquitous in our lives. Since telephones were freed from landlines, we have been provided with numerous programs and methods of communication, like:

- SMS messaging,
- Smart phones like BlackBerries, iPhones, and Androids, and
- The ability to post messages to the Internet via Facebook and Twitter mobile applications.

The use of these forms of text messaging while driving has skyrocketed in the last decade.¹ This has caused great concern in many states and the United States as a whole, leading to many laws being enacted to ban this form of multitasking, **which has been implicated in 1 of every 6 fatal vehicle collision.** Thanks in part to strong laws in many states and communities banning distracted driving and text messaging; there was a downturn in the number of incidents from 2001 to 2004. However, since 2005, the numbers have yet again been on the rise, especially among young drivers and those with histories of automobile accidents.²

Distracted driving, including text messaging has been shown to:

- Significantly slow reaction time,
- Cause drivers to miss sudden changes in road conditions,
- Cause drivers to take their hands off of the steering wheel, and
- Drive in a similar manner of someone who has a Blood Alcohol Content over the legal limit (.08%)

In light of this, researchers have been able to conservatively estimate that 16,000 road fatalities in the United States were a direct result of text messaging while driving from the years of 2001 to 2007, the majority of which were drivers from the age of 16-29.³

How The AMA-MSS Can Help

Members of the AMA-MSS can help educate our community in a number of ways:

- Go to your local high schools and teach students about the dangers of distracted driving and texting while driving.
- Create a letter-writing campaign at your school and in your community to encourage your politicians to create new laws against distracted driving or reinforce existing ones.
- Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper on behalf of your AMA-MSS chapter to remind parents of the dangers.
- Hold an art contest in your school or community to design a poster reminding people of distracted driving. Place the winning poster in the window fronts on local businesses.

Learn More

- <http://www.att.com/gen/press-room?pid=2964>
- <http://info.howcast.com/onroadoffphone>
- <http://www.distration.gov>

Contact Us

AMA MSS Committee on Global and Public Health

- www.ama-assn.org/go/cph

¹ Wilson, F., & Stimpson, J.. (2010). *Trends in Fatalities From Distracted Driving in the United States, 1999 to 2008*. American Journal of Public Health, 100(11), 2213-9.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.