

## **5075 TO THE POINT ABOUT ELIMINATING DRIVING DISTRACTIONS FACT SHEET**

**LENGTH: 12 MINUTES**

### **PROGRAM SYNOPSIS:**

Our workplace is full of hazards, hazards that can hurt us, or kill us. Controlling these hazards and preventing injuries is the point of our safety and health program. One such hazard is the one presented by drivers who fail to maintain concentration while operating motor vehicles. A driver who remains alert and focused on safe vehicle operation can prevent injuries and save lives. That is the point of our organization's effort to eliminate distracted driving and prevent vehicle crashes and that is the point of this program. So, pay close attention as we get to the point about eliminating driving distractions.

Topics include why distracted driving is a problem, the four specific types of distraction, multi-faceted distractions, controlling potential distractions before driving, the role of our physical and mental states in driving awareness and how to avoid complacency while driving.

### **PROGRAM OBJECTIVES:**

After watching the program, the participant will be able to explain the following:

- Why distracted driving is a more complex problem than a teenager using a cell phone behind the wheel;
- What the four types of distraction are and how they adversely affect our driving;
- How our attention can be diverted by a multitude of distractions at the same time;
- Which potential distractions should be controlled before we drive;
- What role our physical and mental states play in driving awareness;
- Which practices and habits can help us break the grip of complacency while driving.

### **INSTRUCTIONAL CONTENT:**

#### **DISTRACTED DRIVING IS A COMPLEX PROBLEM**

- Daydreaming, cell phone use, eating and drinking, passenger activity, applying makeup and adjusting mirrors or the radio are just a few of the many types of activities that can distract us while we are operating a car, truck or other vehicle.
- These types of distractions can quickly lead to a crash, resulting in severe injuries or even deaths, if they cause us to lose our focus on the road, our surroundings or the safe operation of our vehicle. Statistics indicate that one in four motor vehicle fatalities is a result of distracted driving.
- While most people envision distracted driving as a teenager using a cell phone behind the wheel, the problem is really a lot more complex than that. Distraction also involves factors such as complacency, fatigue and frustration. These factors can have a detrimental effect on our concentration no matter how much experience we have behind the wheel.
- Texting while driving rightly receives the most attention as a source of driving distraction but studies show that only about 12 percent of fatal crashes involve cell phone use. This means that there are many other factors that must be understood if we are to truly prevent distracted driving.
- For our purposes, we will define a driver distraction as "any factor or process that takes a driver's focus away from driving." There are four specific types of distraction that contribute to most distracted driving incidents.

#### **VISUAL DISTRACTION**

- The most common type of driving distraction is visual distraction. These are factors that take our eyes off the road so that we no longer see our travel path or the vehicles around us.
- Examples include looking down at your console to find change for a toll booth, trying to catch an item falling to the floor or momentarily staring out the window at a pedestrian that you may recognize.
- Visual distraction can prevent us from seeing or reacting to an approaching hazard.

## **AUDITORY DISTRACTION**

- The second type of distraction is auditory distraction. This occurs when a driver is hearing and listening to sounds not related to driving such as conversations between passengers or listening to the news or music on the radio.
- Auditory distraction can prevent us from hearing the important sounds of the road such as horns or sirens and can also contribute to our third type of distraction, cognitive distraction.

## **COGNITIVE DISTRACTION**

- Cognitive distraction is anything that takes a driver's mind off of the road and away from being solely focused on operating the vehicle. Examples of cognitive distractions include daydreaming, carrying on phone conversations or thinking ahead to the important tasks of the day.
- Cognitive distraction impedes our ability to be aware of and react to changing conditions.

## **MANUAL DISTRACTION**

- The fourth and final type of distraction is manual distraction. Manual distraction refers to the use of our hands, feet or other body parts to manually perform tasks or activities other than driving.
- Some examples include taking our hands off the steering wheel to manipulate food or drink, moving our feet away from the pedals to put on or remove shoes or using our hands to deal with a pet or send a message on a phone.
- Manual distraction is dangerous because it removes our immediate ability to control the vehicle and can delay or even prevent us from making an evasive maneuver.

## **MULTI-FACETED DISTRACTIONS**

- Keep in mind that each of these sources of distraction can easily cause a crash all by themselves, but to make matters even worse, one distraction tends to lead to another, resulting in a driver experiencing a multitude of distractions at the same time.
- For example, counting change for the toll booth is not only a visual distraction, but also requires your hands to hold the coins and your mind to do the math, making this simple task a trifecta of distraction.
- Similarly, texting, carrying on a conversation with passengers or simply shouting and waving at a friend on the sidewalk are all multi-faceted distractions that can quickly lead to a crash.
- It's important to understand that so-called "multi-tasking" is really impossible since our brains can only do one thing at a time.
- Since the one most important thing a driver must do is drive, then that is really all he or she should do. Don't eat, don't drink, don't talk on the phone; just drive.

## **CONTROLLING POTENTIAL DISTRACTIONS BEFORE DRIVING**

- Before heading out take a moment and think about any item, issue or activity that could be distracting and take care of it before you depart or make it a point to ignore it until after you arrive at your destination.
- Put phones, tablets and all other handheld distractions away before driving.
- Even if it is legal to have hands-free conversations in your area, keep in mind that any in-depth conversations can still be very distracting and are not recommended.
- If you must talk or text, pull off the road to do so.
- Make time to complete tasks such as eating, grooming, dressing and other personal activities before you leave for your destination.
- Also, plan your route before you go and program your navigation guidance prior to leaving if it is needed.
- If you need navigation assistance during the trip, have a passenger enter the destination or pull off the road to do it yourself.
- Make sure to adjust seats, mirrors, climate controls and audio components before departing.
- Secure your children in car seats and make sure pets aren't roaming about your vehicle causing distractions.
- Also, make sure any loose gear or other items on the dash, on seats or in the floor are secured so that you won't be tempted to reach for them should they start to roll around the vehicle while it is in motion.
- Finally, don't allow yourself to become a distraction. Avoid calling or texting friends and family members when you know they are driving.
- If you are a passenger and witness someone driving while distracted, make it a point to speak up. Let the driver know that you are uncomfortable with the activity and reinforce how dangerous it is.

## **THE ROLE OF PHYSICAL & MENTAL STATES IN DRIVING AWARENESS**

- In addition to the types of distractions we have already discussed, visual, auditory, cognitive and manual, drivers need to understand that their physical and mental state can also play a role in a driver's level of awareness and ability to focus on the task of driving.
- Extreme emotions such as anger, sadness or frustration can be a detriment to all of our senses and abilities.
- Driving while extremely fatigued is sometimes called "the ultimate distraction" as our eyes glaze over or even nod off into micro-sleeps.
- Eliminating driving distractions require responsible and honest decision making on the part of the driver. Consider your physical and emotional state and choose not to get behind the wheel if you are physically or emotionally unable to drive safely.

## **AVOIDING COMPLACENCY**

- All drivers must recognize and respond to the symptoms of complacency. Complacency is when an activity, like driving, becomes so familiar and routine that we lose our perception of any danger or challenge the activity may present.
- Complacent drivers, even without any other distraction, often become unaware of their surroundings and their actions are driven more by habit than circumstances.
- This is sometimes called "driving without awareness" and it's similar to driving on auto-pilot by responding to outside events without any real mental effort.
- Make it a point to break the grip of complacency by continually reminding yourself of the possible consequences of inattentive driving.
- Choose a variety of routes to your common destinations so no one route becomes routine.
- Redouble your efforts to notice and be aware of your surroundings as you drive as a means to combat complacency.
- Say street names out loud as you pass them, count down your following distance, make note of every speed limit sign. In other words, force yourself to be an alert participant in the task of driving.