

Spotlight on Road Safety: Distracted Driving

With spring comes warmer weather and more action on the streets: children playing, youth bicycling and adults walking. While enjoying the warmer months, keep safety in mind, especially when behind the wheel. Motor vehicle collisions are the leading cause of injury for Canadians 1-24 years of age. In Canada, the number of motor vehicle accidents has been declining yearly with just over 2000 deaths due to collisions in 2011. Safe driving practices including those related to distracted driving can help further reduce these accidents and ensure safe roads for everyone during the spring and summer months.

Most motor vehicle accidents happen between 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. which is during the time when children are coming home from school and adults are returning home from work. Reducing speed is the easiest way to avoid accidents; the higher the speed, the higher the risk of injury or even death to a child pedestrian. Also, keeping attention on the road and reducing distractions limits accidents. Driving distractions includes more than cellphone use, there are many items or actions that take the driver's attention away from the road:

- Using electronics: GPS, CD, DVD players, cellphones, radios, and laptops.
- Reading maps, directions or other materials.
- Grooming: combing hair, putting on make-up.
- Eating or drinking.
- Tending to children or pets.
- Talking with people in the vehicle.
- Visual distractions outside of the car such as accidents and street signs.

Prevention of driving distractions starts before getting behind the wheel. A little preparation before driving can help reduce distractions:

Before driving:

- Turn off your cell phone. Newfoundland and Labrador banned hand-held phone use and texting while driving in 2003.
- Pre-program routes on GPS devices.
- Review all maps and directions prior to driving.
- As much as possible, prepare children with everything they need.
- Keep the car tidy, stow and secure loose objects.
- Secure pets prior to driving.
- Pre-set radio, media and climate control.

Continue with the following tips to avoid distractions once you hit the road:

While driving:

- If you have to make or receive a call, look for a safe opportunity to pull over and park.
- Do not text, surf the web or read e-mails while driving.
- Keep two hands on the wheel at all times.
- Avoid eating, drinking or grooming.

- Reduce your speed, especially in school zones.
- Wear your seatbelt and ensure all passengers wear theirs.
- Keep your eyes and mind on the road.
- Drive defensively, even though you are not distracted, others may be.

In addition to these tips, when spring cleaning consider cleaning and organizing your car! Ensure all items are safely packed away, that all loose objects are stowed in a safe place. This will help reduce distractions inside your vehicle. Spring is also a great time for regular maintenance: check oil levels, top up windshield wash, and check tire pressure.

Keep these tips in mind when getting ready to drive this spring and summer. Reducing distractions while driving will help ensure that everyone shares the roads safely.

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