

Focus on the Road: Not a Part-Time Responsibility

National Safe Driving Week

Driving is a task that demands the driver's complete attention. The unexpected can happen in moments, meaning that even a second of extra reaction time can make the difference between an avoided collision and a potential tragedy.

National Safe Driving Week is December 1- 7 and this year, the Canada Safety Council and the Insurance Brokers' Association of Canada leave you with a simple message: focus on the road is not a part time responsibility.

"Technology has made the task of driving easier in many ways," said Gareth Jones, President and CEO of the Canada Safety Council. "Advances like rear-view cameras and collision avoidance systems serve as support mechanisms to keep us protected. But when technology pulls our attention away from the road, we are taking on risk and need to carefully consider how and when technology is used."

Transport Canada estimates that distraction — often attributed to cell phone and device use — contributes to 21 per cent of fatal collisions and 27 per cent of serious injury collisions. Further, the United States-based National Safety Council estimates that drivers using a phone behind the wheel are up to four times as likely to be involved in a crash as someone who does not use their phone.

"You can't watch the road and check your smartphone at the same time. Even a quick glance can lead to a costly collision," said Peter Braid, Chief Executive Officer of the Insurance Brokers' Association of Canada. "The stakes are high — death, injury, property damage, fines and rising insurance premiums. That's why insurance brokers are partnering with the Canada Safety Council to raise the alarm: it's not safe to multi-task when driving."

The solution, of course, is obvious: don't text and drive. It's never worth it. Few text messages are so important that they need to be read immediately. If you're expecting an urgent message, consider delaying your trip until you've received it. And if the message is an emergency, you can and should pull over and park your vehicle in a safe location. Remember, even receiving a phone call — and especially one that affects your emotional state — can take your attention off the road!

The statistics and opinion polls frequently reflect what, for many, is a lived reality— driving distracted is dangerous. A 2018 survey by CAA reported that Canadians view distracted driving as the #1 threat to their personal safety on the road. However, a 2019 study by Think Insure indicates that, though the overwhelming majority of their respondents acknowledge the dangers, 35 per cent of that same group still admit to texting and driving regardless.

When your attention is not fully on the road, the impacts are numerous:

- Less visual scanning of your surroundings,
- Reduced opportunities to identify visual cues (e.g., signage, lane positioning, turn signals)
- Less time to react to your surroundings, and
- A reduction in critical brain resources needed to assess the road ahead.

Safe driving is one of the most effective habits we can adopt to keep Canadian roads safe for everyone. Be part of the solution, not part of the problem. Let's all do our part and keep our eyes where they belong: on the road!

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Sidebar – Infotainment

Research from the [American Automobile Association indicates](#) that infotainment systems are particularly distracting to older drivers, stating that drivers between the ages of 55 and 75 took their eyes off the road for a full eight seconds longer than drivers ages 21-36, on average.

The key to safe use of infotainment systems, as with most technological tools, is moderation. Where possible, program your GPS and music options prior to departure. Doing so pre-emptively will allow you to program from the safety of a parking space, rather than cause you to scramble to shift your attention back and forth between device and road.

Other simple tips include:

- Use your infotainment system only when you're completely stopped.
- While on the road, limit your activity to passive activities that require no input on your behalf.
- Learn the voice commands for your system, if applicable — using these requires less focus than using a touchscreen or centre console controller.
- Use an app or functionality on your phone to block text messages, rather than have them read through your system.