

# ★ ★ ★ ★ Safety Culture

## ***Majority of Americans Wrongly Believe Hand-Free Cell Phones are Safer than Hand-Held Devices according to a New AAA Foundation Study***

### ***Research Shows Both Equally a Risk to Driver Safety***

Washington, D.C. (12/4/08) – Two-thirds of Americans who use cell phones while driving believe it is safer to talk on a hands-free cell phone than on a hand-held device according to a new study released today by the [AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety](http://www.aaafoundation.org). However, scientific research shows that is simply not the case.

As the number of cell phone subscribers and proportion of drivers using cell phones continues to increase, studies that have analyzed the cell phone records of crash-involved drivers have reported that using a cell phone while driving makes you four times as likely to be involved in a crash.

“Too many Americans are driving with the false sense of security that hands-free devices are somehow safer, which could be a deadly mistake,” said AAA Foundation President and CEO Peter Kissinger. “Evidence shows that using a hands-free phone while driving impairs your reaction time to critical events and increases your crash risk about the same as if you were using a hand-held phone. Drivers need to be aware of the dangers of distracted driving and pay full attention while they are behind the wheel.”

Two recent AAA Foundation surveys of the motoring public have found:

#### ***Over half of U.S. drivers admit to using a cell phone while driving.***

- In one survey, 53% of drivers reported having used a cell phone while driving at least occasionally in the month before they were interviewed; in the other survey, 61% said the same.
- In both surveys, one in six even admitted that they do this regularly.
- Of those who admitted using their cell phone while driving, 60% used a hand-held device and 34% used a hands-free phone.

#### ***One in seven even admitted text messaging while driving in the past 30 days.***

- Young drivers were overwhelmingly more likely than older drivers to text message, and somewhat more likely to talk on cell phones while driving. For example, nearly half of drivers ages 18 to 24 admitted texting while driving at least occasionally, as compared to less than five percent of those ages 45 and older.

Car crashes rank among the leading causes of death in the United States.



***Do as I say, not as I do: Despite survey respondents' belief that drivers using cell phones are a serious traffic safety problem, a large portion admit they at least occasionally talk on a cell phone while driving.***

While cell phone laws vary from state to state, no state has completely banned all cell phone use by drivers. Hand-held cell phone use by drivers is illegal in California, Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, Washington and the District of Columbia. Some states ban all cell phone while driving for particular groups of drivers like teens (18 states and D.C.) or school bus drivers, except in emergency situations (17 states and D.C.). Laws that specifically ban text messaging while driving exist in Alaska, California, Connecticut, Louisiana, Minnesota, New Jersey and Washington state.

"Given the trouble new teen drivers have managing distractions and making safe driving decisions, [AAA](#) encourages all states to enact laws banning teens from using any wireless device while driving," said Kathleen Marvaso, Vice President of Public Affairs for AAA. "Texting while driving poses even greater safety concerns than cell phone use due to the time involved looking away from the road, and should also be made illegal for drivers of all ages. Even if a state does not have a law banning these sorts of distracting activities, drivers should focus on safe driving at all times."

State legislatures and local governments continue to push for more laws to stem this behavior. Hand-held banning bills were considered in 30 states in 2008. Localities with handheld phone bans include: Chicago, Ill.; Brookline, Mass.; Santa Fe, N.M.; Detroit, Mich.; Brooklyn, North Olmstead, and Walton Hills, Ohio; and Conshohocken, Lebanon, and West Conshohocken, Pa. No state or locality has banned all cell phone use for drivers, although bills were considered in six state legislatures in 2008. Legislation that would ban text messaging while driving was considered in 26 states in 2008, with cities including Phoenix, Ariz., Chicago, Ill., and Detroit, Mich. having passed local ordinances outlawing the activity.

"Young drivers face an array of potentially deadly challenges behind the wheel," said Kissinger. "Parents should ensure cell phone use while driving, whether hands-free or not, isn't added to the list of distractions at this critical time for new drivers."

For more information, visit [www.AAAFoundation.org](http://www.AAAFoundation.org). For a breakdown of laws by state, visit [www.AAAPublicAffairs.com](http://www.AAAPublicAffairs.com).

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*Established in 1947 by AAA, the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety is an independent, publicly funded, 501(c)(3) charitable research and educational organization. The AAA Foundation's mission is to prevent traffic deaths and injuries by conducting research into their causes and by educating the public about strategies to prevent crashes and reduce injuries when they do occur.*

*The data reported here were collected in two national telephone surveys: the AAA Foundation's [2008 Traffic Safety Culture Index](#) (AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, 2008), and Opinion Research Corporation's CARAVAN® omnibus survey (Opinion Research Corporation, 2008). The 2008 Traffic Safety Culture Index, was a telephone survey of 2,509 U.S. adults 18 years of age and older, conducted via landline and cellular telephone, in English and in Spanish, by NuStats, LLC, from October 25, 2007 through January 10, 2008. This survey included questions on a number of various traffic safety issues including driver distraction and cell phone use. CARAVAN is a weekly cost-shared telephone omnibus survey of adults 18 years of age and older living in private households in the continental U.S. CARAVAN telephone interviews conducted from September 4, 2008 through September 8, 2008 included questions on driving and cell phone use which were paid for by the AAA Foundation.*

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## Cell Phones and Driving: Research Update

### The Problem:

- In the U.S. as of December 2007, 84% of the population or 255 million people were wireless telephone subscribers (CTIA-The Wireless Association).
  - These users spent 2.1 trillion minutes talking and sent 363 billion text messages in one year, showing a 300% increase in annual minutes compared to statistics from 2000.
- In 2007, an estimated 11% of drivers were using hand-held or hands-free phones while driving at any given daylight moment (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration).
- Two studies looking at the cell phone records of crashes-involved drivers have reported that phone use while driving is associated with approximately a quadrupling of crash risk.
- Studies using driving simulators have found that using a cell phone while driving significantly impairs several aspects of driving performance, especially reaction time.
- Although laws in several states prohibit hand-held cell phone use while driving while allowing hands-free use, the best available research suggests that using a hands-free phone while driving is no safer than using a hands-held phone.

### The Research:

- Two national telephone surveys:
  - The AAA Foundation's 2008 Traffic Safety Culture Index, a nationally-representative survey via landline and cellular telephone, in English and in Spanish, from October 25, 2007 through January 10, 2008, by NuStats, LLC, surveying a random sample of 2,509 U.S. adults ages 18 and older about a variety of major traffic safety issues, including cell phone use while driving.
  - Opinion Research Corporation's CARAVAN®, a cost-shared omnibus survey of adults ages 18 and older living in private households in the continental U.S. 2,009 CARAVAN interviews conducted from September 4 through September 8, 2008 included questions paid for by the AAA Foundation about cell phone use while driving as well as opinions of the safety of hands-free cell phones while driving compared with hand-held cell phones.

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## Key Findings:

- Both surveys found that more than half of all drivers admitted talking on a cell phone while driving in the past 30 days. Specifically:
  - The TSC Index survey found 53% of drivers admitted having talked on a cell phone while driving and 17% admitted doing it often or very often.
  - The CARAVAN omnibus survey found 61% had talked on the phone while driving with 16% confessing to engaging in the behavior regularly.
  - Both surveys found that younger drivers were somewhat more likely to talk on cell phones while driving. For example, in the TSC Index, two out of three respondents aged 18 to 34 reported using cell phones while driving, as compared to 53% of drivers aged 45 to 54 and 32% of drivers aged 55 and older.
- Respondents from both surveys were asked how often they read or sent text messages while driving in past 30 days. The surveys showed that 14% and 17% respectively admitted text messaging while driving in the past 30 days; both surveys found that 3% of drivers reported doing it regularly. Both surveys found that younger drivers were overwhelmingly more likely than mature drivers to text message. For example, nearly half of drivers aged 18 to 24 admitted text messaging while driving in the TSC Index, compared to 27% of those aged 25 to 34 and fewer than 5% of those over age 45.
- The TSC Index found 83% of drivers felt that drivers using cell phone was a serious problem, but 46% of those same drivers also admitted to using a cell phone while driving.
- The CARAVAN omnibus survey found 2 out of 3 drivers think that using a hands-free cell phone while driving is safer than using a hand-held phone.