

Press Release

Distracted road users cause high risk of accidents

Complete Concentration Required

- High number of unrecorded cases of accidents due to inattention
- Study: distraction kills more road users than alcohol
- Important cues about the road situation are missed

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Anyone who makes phone calls or reads or sends text messages while driving a car is at a hugely increased risk of being involved in an accident, DEKRA's accident researchers warn. Pedestrians and cyclists who are distracted by their phones or using headphones are also in danger.

"When we're bored at home, distractions are more than welcome – but on the road, they're the last thing we need," warns DEKRA accident researcher Luigi Ancona. "The demands placed on us as road users are so complex that we have to give it our undivided attention if we want to get home safe. Multitasking quite simply doesn't work in road transport situations, as we're very limited in our ability to do it. Our complete concentration is required at all times."

According to a study from the Allianz Center for Technology (AZT), inattentiveness is the cause of one in ten car accidents that result in an injury. This would mean that distracted driving results in more deaths than drink driving. However, this is not yet reflected in Germany's official statistics. Distracted driving (which was reported separately for the first time in the country in 2021) accounted for a total of 2% of accidents that resulted in personal injury, with 0.3% caused by the use of electronic devices.

"We have to assume a very high number of unrecorded cases here," Ancona says. In a 2017 DEKRA Accident Research traffic survey, 7% of drivers were distracted by their cellphones at any given time on average.

Three seconds at 50 mph means driving blind for 220 feet

"Who would choose to close their eyes for several seconds while they were behind the wheel of a vehicle? Very few indeed, I think it's safe to say," says the DEKRA accident researcher. Still, many cannot resist the urge to check their messages while driving. "The effect is the same. If you're going at 30 mph and look at your phone for three seconds, you'll have traveled about 137 feet without looking. At 50 mph, it's around 220 feet.

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An endless variety of activities can distract from the actual task of driving, including an attention-consuming phone call, reading and writing messages, talking to passengers, eating, drinking, smoking, attending to children in the back seat or pets inside the vehicle, or even using the navigation or audio system, often via a complex touch display.

“These are all problematic across the board, some more and some less,” Ancona explains. “Any secondary activity that causes a driver to lose concentration on what’s happening on the road creates a potential hazard – for themselves and for others,” says the accident researcher.

Missing important cues

This is also fully applicable to pedestrians and cyclists. In the event of a collision, they are usually at risk of far more serious injuries than the better protected car occupants. For instance, people who read or write text messages while crossing the road are often unable to see important cues from the traffic and cannot react appropriately.

And people wearing headphones underestimate the fact that we also need acoustic information and signals to help us safely navigate the road, whether this comes from a car’s horn, a streetcar’s or cyclist’s bell ringing, a rumbling engine, or an ambulance’s siren. The accident researcher’s recommendation is clear: “Always focus your full attention on what’s happening on the road. That means not just keeping your eyes open, but your ears too!”

Distracted driving is one of the topics covered in the DEKRA Road Safety Report 2022 "Mobility of Young People". The entire report can be found online at www.dekra-roadsafety.com.

About DEKRA

DEKRA has been active in the field of safety for almost 100 years. Founded in 1925 in Berlin as Deutscher Kraftfahrzeug-Überwachungs-Verein e.V., it is today one of the world’s leading expert organizations. DEKRA SE is a subsidiary of DEKRA e.V. and manages the Group’s operating business. In 2021, DEKRA generated sales totaling more than EUR 3.5 billion. The company currently employs almost 48,000 people in approximately 60 countries on all continents. With qualified and independent expert services, they work for safety on the road, at work and at home. These services range from vehicle inspection and expert appraisals to claims services, industrial and building inspections, safety consultancy, testing and certification of products and systems, as well as training courses and temporary work. The vision for the company’s 100th birthday in 2025 is that DEKRA will be the global partner for a safe, secure and sustainable world. With a platinum rating from EcoVadis, DEKRA is now in the top one percent of sustainable businesses ranked.