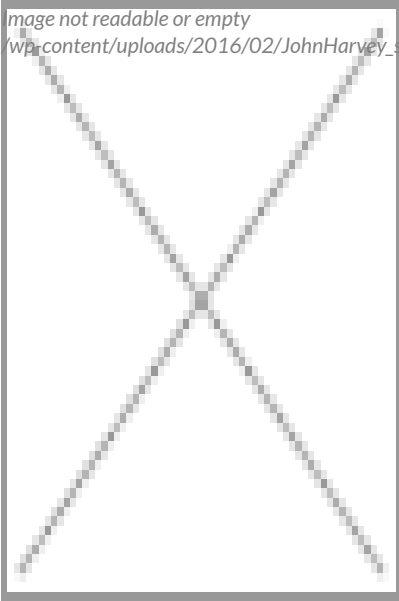


Distracted driving can lead to fines, injury, or possibly even death

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Technological advancements have made it possible to complete work anytime from anywhere, but just because it is possible does not mean it is prudent.

With the ever-increasing speed of communication, you may feel pressured to respond to work requests immediately. However, if an instant response means taking your attention away from driving – even for a second – it isn't worth it.

Traffic accidents caused by distracted driving are a growing problem in Georgia. Traffic accidents increased 36 percent from 2014 to 2016 and in that same time period traffic fatalities rose 34 percent killing 1,561 people. That's an average of one person every six hours.

In response to the increasing danger of Georgia roads, insurance premium rates increased 12.2 percent in Georgia in 2016, more than double the national average increase of 5.6 percent. To curb the destruction, Georgia representatives

recently introduced House Bill 673, which would strengthen the texting and driving law enacted in 2010.

The bill, which is currently working its way through the house, would allow for hands-free cell phone use either through dashboard mounts, voice commands or hands-free technology such as Bluetooth, but would impose fines if police officers see phones in drivers' hands.

Thirteen states that have enacted similar laws have seen an average 16 percent decrease in fatalities in the two years after passing and enforcing such laws.

The current law bans all motorists from text messaging while driving. Some drivers have misunderstood the law to only ban texts and have believed that other messaging apps were permissible. But the ban includes writing, reading, and sending texts, emails, instant messages, and Internet data on any cell phone, tablet, messaging device, laptop, or a substantially similar device. Current law bans minor motorists from all cell phone or similar wireless communication use.

A texting or cell phone ticket currently costs \$150 and adds one demerit point to the person's driving record. As proposed, the new law would impose a \$450 fine for each offense and a staggered point system that would result in a suspended license if someone has four offenses in a 24-month period. Legislators hope that the more severe penalties will encourage drivers to put down their phones and pay attention to the road. Even this stronger legislation might not be enough to make our roads safe.

Texting while driving is the most dangerous distracted driving activity because it combines all three types of distraction: visual, manual and cognitive. Sending or reading a text for 5 seconds can take your eyes off the road long enough to cover the distance of a football field if you're traveling at 55 miles per hour.

A hands-free law really only eliminates the danger of manual and maybe visual distractions. The risk of cognitive distraction still exists.

The safest alternative is to eliminate cell phone distraction entirely. You can do this by silencing or turning off your phone when you get into the car. Alternatively, Apple's iOS 11 update to the iPhone now has a feature that prevents you from receiving any incoming messages or news updates while the phone is connected by Bluetooth, cable or while the car is moving. If someone does text you while you're driving, the phone sends an automatic response alerting the sender that you're driving and can't respond. Likewise, you can download apps for your android phone with similar results.

Work can wait. The demands of safety outweigh the pressures of work and we have to make allowances not only for ourselves but also for our coworkers and our employees. Distracted driving is dangerous and no business deal is worth the risk of a collision or fatality.

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