

Death by Texting: America's New Scourge

Researchers at the Cohen Medical Center in New Hyde Park, NY now confirm that more teens die annually from texting while driving than from alcohol. In the past year, 3,000 teens died as a result of texting while driving whereas 2,700 died from driving while intoxicated. There were also 300,000 teens severely injured while texting. The CDC reports that 282,000 teens were injured while driving under the influence of alcohol.

Dr. Andrew Adesman of the Cohen research team found that among 8,947 teens, 40% of boys and 45% of girls admitted to frequently texting while driving. Teens were equally likely to text while driving in states with anti-texting laws on the books as in states with no such laws. "Clearly these laws are not effective deterrents" according to Dr. Adesman.

The new data is in sharp contrast to recent statistics on drinking and driving among teens. The CDC reports that alcohol use by teen drivers has decreased 54% since 1991. But texting is skyrocketing. "Fifty percent of high school students of driving age acknowledge texting while driving," according to Dr. Adesman, which suggests that they've traded in one lethal habit for another. He adds. "A driver who is texting can be as impaired as a driver who is legally drunk" noting that a texting driver is distracted from observing traffic and the function of his or her own vehicle.

As Harvard Law Professor Jonathan Zittrain observes, "The qualities that make Twitter insane and half-baked are what make it so powerful!"



But lethal texting is not just a teen problem. The National Transportation Safety Board determined that on August 26th, 2011 an EMS helicopter crashed near Liberty, Missouri killing all onboard in part because the pilot was texting during most of the flight and just before a critical maneuver. The NTSB cited a growing concern in the transportation field – the risk of "distraction." The Board concluded that "The pilot's focus *must* be on the task at hand: safe transportation."



Clearly, texting will remain a fact of life until a new communication platform makes it obsolete. Until then, three rules of survival apply:

1. Completely abstain while operating any type of vehicle.
2. Vigilantly observe those operating vehicles in your proximity.
3. Refuse to ride with an operator who does not adhere to rules #1 and #2 above.