Taking your eyes off the road for just one second can have devastating consequences.

In 2013, driver distraction contributed to 19 fatalities and 1,343 hospitalised casualties on Queensland roads.

However, the true extent to which distractions (including mobile phone usage), contributes to road crashes is likely to be higher because drivers will not necessarily admit when reporting a crash to police that they were distracted when a crash occurred.

Despite the dangers and illegality, approximately 76% of Queenslanders use their mobile phone illegally in the car.

The facts

- In 2013, there were 271 fatalities and 6,921 hospitalised casualties on Queensland roads. Distractions and inattention are known to have contributed to 19 fatalities (or 7.0%) and 1,343 hospitalised casualties (or 19.4%).

- Using a mobile phone while driving is highly distracting and can increase your risk of a serious crash by four times.

- Research shows that using a mobile phone while driving can be as risky as drink driving. However, unlike drink driving, a distracted driver consciously and soberly decides not to pay attention to the road – placing themselves and others in harm's way.
Using a mobile phone increases your risk of a crash – by four times

A person using a hand-held or hands-free mobile phone while driving is four times more likely to have a serious crash resulting in hospitalisation.6

Driving is a task that requires all of your attention in order to be safe. Using a mobile phone while driving, especially texting, is highly distracting and can lead to:

- riskier decision making – using a mobile phone while driving affects judgement and concentration
- slower reactions – you generally react slower when using a mobile phone, particularly when you’re deep in conversation; you may take longer to respond to traffic signals or completely miss them
- slower and less controlled braking – during a mobile phone call, your brake reaction time is slower, and you brake with more force and less control, resulting in shorter stopping distances between yourself and the car in front
- not being alert to your surroundings – when using a mobile phone, you tend to spend less time checking your mirrors and what’s going on around you. This affects your ability to monitor and negotiate traffic safely.

Even the smallest distraction at the wrong time can be deadly

An unexpected event can happen at any time – so even the smallest distraction can be deadly. Using a mobile phone when driving can often result in taking your eyes off the road – a distraction that may have consequences.

Even when your eyes are off the road for just two seconds, a vehicle moving at 60km/h travels more than 33 metres – the average person’s time to react to an event is 1.8 seconds. This means nearly four seconds can pass before the average ‘distracted’ driver can react to a hazard, increasing their risk of a serious crash (see Table 1 below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Travel Speed</th>
<th>Distraction Time</th>
<th>Distance Travelled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>40 km/h</td>
<td>2 seconds</td>
<td>22.22 metres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 km/h</td>
<td>2 seconds</td>
<td>27.78 metres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 km/h</td>
<td>2 seconds</td>
<td>33.33 metres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80 km/h</td>
<td>2 seconds</td>
<td>44.44 metres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100 km/h</td>
<td>2 seconds</td>
<td>55.56 metres</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 displays the distance travelled in two seconds by a driver at various speeds.

Risky behaviour

Mobile phone use is one of the most prevalent risky driving behaviours on the road. A 2014 survey of 3,000 Queensland drivers found that:

- More than three quarters of Queenslanders (76%) use their mobile phone illegally in the car.
- Texting is the most prevalent behaviour, at traffic lights (50%) and while driving (25%).
- A quarter of drivers (25%) check email, social media and the internet at the lights, and 15% do so while driving.
- More than half (62%) of frequent phone users see the need to change their behaviour.

The two key influencers that drivers use to explain mobile phone use are the need to keep in touch with people and the pressure to respond to text and calls immediately.
I can quickly check a text message when driving

Text messaging while driving is especially dangerous, and can result in physical, visual, auditory and cognitive distraction. Retrieving a message, reading it and sending a reply, increases the time your eyes are off the road. This can lead to:

- incorrect lane changes
- travelling at inconsistent speeds
- missing road signs and hazards like pedestrians, cyclists, dropped road edges and other vehicles.

Talking on a mobile phone while driving is the same as talking to a passenger

Talking to a passenger is in fact less distracting than talking on a mobile phone. If a dangerous situation develops, the passenger can stop talking to allow the driver to concentrate. On a mobile phone, the other person is unaware of the danger and will continue talking, distracting the driver further when full concentration is required.

It’s safe to use my mobile phone while stopped in traffic or at traffic lights

It is illegal to use a handheld mobile phone at any time while driving, unless you are safely and legally parked. Drivers are generally slower to react when using a mobile phone, taking longer to respond to traffic signals or missing them completely. You could also be tempted to continue to use your phone as you slow down to a stop in traffic or as you take off again. It’s safer to avoid the temptation and the risk of a fine, and keep your hands off your phone.

I’m a good driver so I can multitask

A good driver concentrates on the road at all times because the unexpected – like when a pedestrian steps out from behind a vehicle or cars quickly pass or merge – can happen anywhere and at any time. No matter how well we think we can multitask, generally the performance of one task is hampered by the other and this is a significant risk to take when one of those tasks is driving a vehicle.

Using my mobile phone isn’t that dangerous

The danger of using your phone while driving cannot be underestimated. Research shows that a driver’s response time to an event on the road while texting on a phone is comparable to that of a driver with a blood alcohol reading of between .07 and .10. Using a mobile phone while driving is distracting in the following ways:

- physical distraction – because the driver’s hand is moved from the steering wheel to pick up the phone, answer or end the call, or type a message
- visual distraction – because the driver’s eyes are diverted from the road to seek the phone, view the buttons or read a message
- auditory distraction – caused when sounds prevent drivers from making the best use of their hearing, because the driver’s attention is drawn to the voice on the phone
- cognitive distraction – even the best drivers have difficulty processing two or more pieces of information at the same time. Talking on a mobile phone while driving may cause lapses of attention, concentration and judgement as the driver’s attention is divided between the driving task and conversation.
Tip for staying focused on the roads

- Switch your phone to silent or flight mode, put it in the glove box, or switch it off.
- Let everyone know you’re driving phone free and remove pressure to be in contact.
- Phone home before you leave work and check if you need to pick something up on the way home.
- Designate a texter so you can concentrate on the drive.
- Pull over and park safely before even considering picking up your phone or GPS.

1. Data Analysis, Department of Transport and Main Roads QLD. Fatality data extracted 9 April 2015, Hospitalised data extracted 16 April 2015.


3. Data Analysis, Department of Transport and Main Roads QLD. Fatality data extracted 9 April 2015, Hospitalised data extracted 16 April 2015.


