



Since the inception of ICRMP in 1985, our most frequent cause of Property/Casualty claims has been auto claims. No other claim category comes close. The bad news: auto crashes are frequent and severe for Idaho local government agencies. The good news is that auto crashes can be reduced by focusing on safe driving!

Cognitive Impairment – It’s all in your head

According to the National Safety Council, nearly 1 out of every 5 motor vehicle crashes involves cell phone use at the time of the crash. Cell phone use while driving isn’t just a visual and manual distraction, but a cognitive distraction. In addition to taking their eyes and hands off the wheel, distracted drivers take their mind off the primary task of driving. Drivers talking on cell phones miss half of the information in their driving environment. Many drivers mistakenly believe hands-free cell phones are safer than handheld. However, hands-free cell phones do not eliminate cognitive distraction. It’s the conversation not the device that creates the danger.

Understanding the Distracted Brain

Human brains are unable to effectively perform two cognitively complex tasks at the same time, such as driving and talking on a cell phone. A Carnegie Mellon University study produced functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) pictures of the brain while study participants drove using a simulator and listened to spoken sentences they were asked to judge as true or false. The listening to sentences on cell phones decreased activity in the brain’s parietal lobe by 37%. Drivers use this area of the brain for navigation and visual tracking of movement.

Multitasking Impairs Performance

Drivers distracted by cell phone conversations not only display slower reaction times and have difficulty staying in their lane, but also are less likely to see: high and low relevant objects, visual cues, exits, red lights and stop signs, navigational signage. Drivers talking on cell phones are more likely to make driving errors than drivers talking with passengers. Why? Adult passengers often actively help drivers by monitoring and discussing traffic. Whereas a person on the phone cannot see the roadway and adjust the conversation as needed.

Employer Costs

In recent years, numerous plaintiffs have filed and won multi-million dollar actions against employers for injuries arising from negligent driving of an employee who was distracted by the use of a cell phone. Multitasking while driving may seem like a time-saving solution, but it isn’t worth the risk.

Source: National Safety Council. Permission to reprint granted by the National Safety Council, a membership organization dedicated to protecting life and promoting health.

Cell Phones

In Idaho, reading, writing, sending, or receiving of written communication (text messaging) while driving is illegal and considered an infraction. Many crashes are caused by people who try to text or dial cell phones while driving. If you must use a cell phone, park in a safe place before making the call or engaging in text messaging.

Source: From Idaho Driver’s Manual (2014)

Discuss:

1. What % of the time do you talk on your cell phone while driving?
2. Have you or someone you know had a “close call” with cell phones & driving?
3. Review your agency’s vehicle use policy.