

MOHSS

Montana Occupational Health & Safety Surveillance

April 2023

Distracted Driving Month



Photos courtesy of Unsplash

Pay attention to the situation

As Montanans know, April is an erratic month in terms of weather. It can snow one day and be sunny and in the 50's/60's the next. April is Distracted Driving Awareness Month and, of course, distracted driving is especially dangerous when road conditions are bad. Below are a few points to keep in mind this month.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration there were 3,522 people killed in distracted driving accidents in 2021.¹ To put this in perspective, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported 8,092 deaths (in 2019) from Melanoma which one of the most common types of cancer.² This means that people are only 2.3 times less likely to die from distracted driving than from this deadly skin cancer.

Distracted driving is especially problematic in the modern tech era. Cell phones and other digital devices with their multitude of apps, can make distracted driving a very real danger. This is especially true for teenagers who are already at risk due to lack of driving experience.

In addition to the commonly known distractions such as eating, applying cosmetics, and high stereo volume, there are distractions that people might not normally consider. Think for a moment about that whistling noise coming from a damaged wiper blade, or the spot on the windshield that won't disappear no matter how much washer fluid you use.



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Safe driving requires engagement and situational awareness. Distractions affecting any of the senses might prevent you from seeing that pedestrian in the crosswalk or hearing the grocery store customer yelling “Stop” as you are backing out of your parking spot.

A couple of tips that can be helpful include keeping up with preventative maintenance on your vehicle as well as limiting digital distractions by turning your device off or muting the volume and flipping it over.

Driving is arguably the most dangerous thing we do as Montanans. This is especially true when the roads are slick as is often the case during Montana’s spring months. Keep your head on a swivel, both hands on the wheel and get there safely. Remember, there is always the option of simply staying home.

References:

- (1) <https://www.nhtsa.gov/april-distracted-driving-awareness-month>
- (2) Melanoma. <https://gis.cdc.gov/Cancer/USCS/#/AtAGlance/>