

National Distracted Driver Awareness Month

04.20.2020

During April's National Distracted Driver Awareness Month, we are reminded to pause and consider the dangers associated with distracted driving. At Bailey Glasser we have seen first-hand how our clients' and their families' lives have been devastated by negligent driving. Distracted driving continues to be a leading cause of motor vehicle accidents on our roadways.

What is distracted driving?

There are four types of distracted driving of which you should be aware:

1. Visual - Taking your eyes off the road
2. Auditory - Hearing something that is not related to driving
3. Manual - Reaching or manipulating something other than the steering wheel
4. Cognitive - Thinking of something other than driving

There are several forms of distractions that may impact your ability to safely operate your motor vehicle. Distractions can originate inside the vehicle - cell phones, gauges, navigation, tablets - or can occur outside the vehicle - road signs, scenery, observing an accident, or weather.

Distractions can come in many forms; however, we want to bring attention to a distraction that dangerously combines visual, auditory, manual, and cognitive distractions - texting! Sending and receiving text messages requires drivers to take their eyes off the road upon hearing a text alert; use one or both hands to type a response; and thinking about the message and their response all while operating a motor vehicle.

Sending or reading a text will take your eyes off the road on average between 5 and 23 seconds per message. While traveling at 55 MPH, reading, or sending average a text is the equivalent of driving the length of a football field with your eyes closed. The distance traveled is much greater, and danger heightened, when traveling at 70 MPH on the interstate.

Consequences

Each day in the US, approximately 9 people are killed and more than 1,000 injured in crashes that are reported to involve a distracted driver. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), distracted driving claimed 2,841 lives in 2018 alone – 1,730 drivers, 605 passengers, 400 pedestrians, and 77 bicyclists. The NHTSA estimates that an additional 400,000 people were injured in crashes that involved distracted drivers in 2018. In 2019, distracted driving was a reported factor in 8.5% of fatal motor vehicle crashes in the US.

The greatest risk factor for distracted driving is age. Drivers under the age of 20 have the highest proportion of distraction-related fatal crashes.

Solutions

Thankfully, the dangers associated with distracted driving can be almost entirely controlled by our own actions. Many states have enacted laws to protect its drivers that ban texting while driving and institute graduated licensing systems for teen drivers – all intended to raise awareness about the dangers of distracted driving. In West Virginia, cell phone use – both talking and texting – is prohibited while operating a motor vehicle for drivers of all ages. Cell phone use is only permitted with a hands-free device such as an earpiece or on-board speaker.

At the federal level, the US has banned cell phone and electronic device use for commercial vehicle drivers. This means that tractor-trailer drivers are not permitted to use cellular phones or electronic devices unless connected to hands-free device.

The laws passed at the state and federal level have reduced distracted driving injuries and fatalities, however, the threat remains as 2,841 deaths and 400,000 injuries occurred in 2018. We must police ourselves and have the courage to remind our friends and family that distracted driving is dangerous and should be avoided. There may be no greater enforcement than a friendly reminder from a loved one – the life you save could be your own.

Attorneys

Travis A. Prince

Practice Areas

Catastrophic Personal Injury