Fleet survey report 2017

Driver distraction

Produced by:

Brake professional

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About Brake Professional

Brake Professional is a low-cost global membership scheme for fleet professionals, run by Brake, the road safety charity. The Brake Professional membership scheme is open to any organisation operating any kind of vehicle, suppliers to the fleet industry and anyone else with an interest in fleet safety. Brake Professional provides its members with practical road safety guidance and tools, and free and discounted access to Brake training and events. Find out more at **brakepro.org**.

About this report

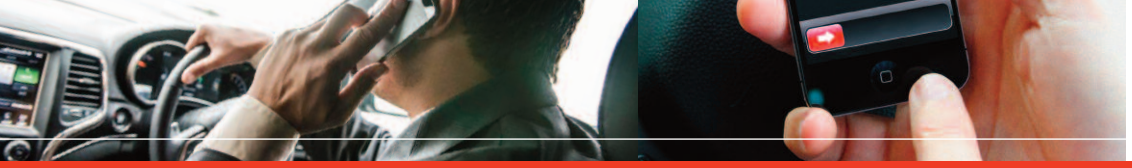
This report is based on the results of an online survey sponsored by Licence Bureau. The survey was completed by 355 fleet representatives. Although the majority of respondents are based in the UK, responses also came from fleets based in Asia, North America, mainland Europe and Australasia. Respondents manage almost 267,000 vehicles in total, including mopeds, cars, vans, trucks and buses, and more than 35,000 employees that regularly drive for work. The size of the fleets varied: the smallest were single-vehicle operators; the largest had more than 135,000 vehicles. They answered questions on policy, in-vehicle technology, driver education and accountability within their organisations.

Introduction

Driving requires the full attention of the driver. Hazards can arise at any time, and vehicles can travel a considerable distance in a short amount of time. A moment's distraction can have fatal consequences. Anything that draws the driver's attention away from the road – through sight, sound, thought or physical action – is a distraction. Preventing driver distraction is one of the most important things that fleet managers can do to make their workforce safer.

Our survey findings suggest that although fleet managers are aware of the risks of distraction, this needs to be better reflected in company policy, as well as through the introduction of best practice initiatives, evidence-based interventions, effective driver education and data monitoring.

To find out more about how to manage road risk, including distraction, visit the Brake Professional website (www.brakepro.org).



DISTRACTION POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Distraction is a factor in a significant number of crashes. For example, in 2016, failing to look properly was identified as a contributory factor in 37% of crashes that caused death or serious injury in Great Britain. A further 880 incidences of in-vehicle distractions, distractions outside the vehicle or phone use were recorded as contributory factors in crashes that killed or seriously injured.[1] In the USA, 3,450 people were killed in crashes involving distracted drivers in 2016,[2] while a European Commission study has estimated that road user distraction contributes to between 10 and 30% of crashes.[3] Implementing a policy to prevent distracted drivers in professional fleets is clearly an important way of improving safety in the workforce.

We asked fleet operators what policies and procedures their organisation has in place for managing driver distraction caused by mobile phones and other technologies, including display screens and head-up devices.

Key findings:

- Seven out of 10 (71%) respondents have implemented policies aimed at preventing driver distraction at the wheel.
- Nine out of ten (91%) organisations that have implemented policies for driver distraction have banned the use of hand-held mobile phones while driving, but less than a third (32%) have restricted the use of hands-free phones.
- Four out of ten (41%) respondents said that they supported Brake's call for the UK government to extend the ban on mobile phone use at the wheel to include hands-free use.

Without clear guidance, it is difficult for at-work drivers to know what is expected of them and how to prevent distraction at the wheel. A good distraction policy also provides line managers and senior leadership with guidelines for contacting staff while they are on the road, and details on how to incorporate distraction into driver training schemes and identify when disciplinary action is required.

Brake is calling for the UK government to ban the use of any mobile phone (hand-held and hands-free) by drivers at the wheel. There is good support for this campaign: 41% of respondents said that they supported an outright ban on all phone use while driving, and 43% said they would support an organisation-wide ban on mobile phones at work, including hands-free devices.

TYPES OF DISTRACTION

Modern life places heavy demands on at-work drivers, encouraging them to multitask despite the risk of distraction. There are a range of distractions that have the potential to draw a driver's attention away from the road, and we canvassed opinion on how organisations try to manage these.

Mobile phones

Of those organisations that have chosen to implement policies for driver distraction, more than nine out of ten (91%) have banned the use of hand-held mobile phones by drivers behind the wheel; however, this prohibition is rarely extended to cover hands-free devices. Less than a third (32%) of fleets restrict the use of hands-free phones by at-work drivers, despite the risk of distraction.

Hands-free calls cause similar levels of distraction to hand-held calls. It is the call itself that causes distraction, not holding the phone. Studies have confirmed that drivers speaking on a hands-free device experience 'visual tunnelling' that limits their field of vision, placing themselves and other road users at risk.[4] Research has also shown that it can take drivers about 30 seconds to regain full attention after interacting with an information system such as a phone or other device,[5] but 57% of respondents said that they were unaware of this.

In the USA, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) is partnering with individual states and local police to enforce laws against distracted driving. A large-scale observational study estimated that during daylight hours, over half a million drivers are using their phones while driving at any given time.[6] Texting is seen as the most alarming distraction: sending or reading a text takes a driver's eyes off the road for 5 seconds. At 55mph, that's the equivalent of driving the length of an American football pitch with your eyes closed.[7]

In-vehicle technology

Most of the fleets that we surveyed (93%) use some kind of in-vehicle technology, including sat-nav and telematics systems, with some forms of technology being much more prevalent than others. Sat-navs and GPS are a common feature – 68% of respondents said their organisations have them installed in vehicles – and telematics systems are also widely used (in 56% of fleets that responded). By contrast, only 6% of respondents said they had head-up devices (HUDs) installed in their vehicles.

Only 43% of respondents (108 fleets) instruct drivers not to adjust, or communicate using, any technology installed in their vehicle while driving. A similar number (104 fleets) said they would always take disciplinary action against employees who do not adhere to company policy on mobile phones and other devices; a further 96 fleets would take disciplinary action, but only if an incident was reported.

In-vehicle technology is a potentially dangerous distraction in any vehicle, and many drivers allow themselves to be distracted because they mistakenly believe that they are in control. Research shows that drivers are incapable of accurately assessing their level of control over their vehicle,[8] and the vast majority of drivers are not able to divide their attention without a significant deterioration in driving performance.[9]

Head-up devices (HUDs)
HUDs use technology that displays driving-related information onto the vehicle's windscreen. Although they are often marketed as a safe alternative to dashboard-mounted devices – because they reduce the need for the driver to look away from the road – research has found that they may encourage longer periods of distraction.[10] HUDs can also be linked to the driver's smartphone, enabling communication and entertainment information to appear on the windscreen.

Only 6% of respondents said that their organisation has HUD technology installed in company vehicles; of those that do have the technology, devices factory-fitted by the vehicle manufacturer are more commonplace than third-party or smartphone devices.

Respondents whose organisations have installed HUDs were divided over whether they encouraged safer driving than hands-free or other dashboard-mounted devices, with equal numbers agreeing and disagreeing that they were a safer alternative.

Eating and drinking
Representatives of 98 fleets said that, as part of their organisation's distraction policy, they do not allow their drivers to eat and drink at the wheel. Eating and drinking can be a cognitive and physical distraction for drivers, with studies suggesting that it can significantly increase driver reaction times; drivers who eat and drink at the wheel are up to twice as likely to be involved in a crash.[11]

Music
Only 34 fleets have banned their drivers from listening to loud music in work vehicles. Listening to loud music at the wheel slows drivers' reaction times and encourages a more aggressive driving style,[12] while changing the radio station or adjusting the volume of the music is physical distraction.

Smoking
In some countries, including the UK, it is illegal to smoke when driving for work; however, only 64% of survey respondents have a policy that forbids drivers from smoking at the wheel of a company vehicle. Finding and lighting a cigarette is a mental and physical distraction that requires the driver to remove a hand from the wheel and focus attention on the cigarette and not on the road. Smoke and ash from the cigarette can also distract the driver and create a fire hazard.

Passengers
47 fleets insist that drivers keep interaction with passengers to a minimum, avoiding in-depth conversation or heated debates. Too much noise in the vehicle draws the drivers' attention away from the road. Passenger interaction should be kept to a minimum.

Grooming
74 fleets have banned drivers from grooming at the wheel. This includes applying make-up, brushing hair and shaving.

DRIVER MONITORING

Key findings:

- More than a third of the organisations surveyed (128 fleets) do not monitor driver distraction levels.
- Of those that do, 66 fleets have introduced a 'self-reporting' system that requires the driver to be aware of and admit to any wrong-doing.

These findings are worrying: without detailed, accurate, non-biased data, it is difficult for organisations to identify areas that require improvement. Through effective monitoring of drivers and their distraction levels, line managers can introduce systems that reward safe drivers and help prevent dangerous behaviour before a crash can occur.

Measuring performance, investigating the causes of 'accidents, incidents or near-misses' and taking action on lessons learned are all included in the Health & Safety Executive (HSE)'s Plan Do Check Act approach to management, which forms part of its Driving at Work guidelines.[13,14] Monitoring driver distraction will help enable fleet managers to develop, implement and review policies in line with that advice.

As well as self-monitoring, the following systems are used by fleets to monitor driver distraction: in-vehicle cameras (10 fleets), lane departure warning systems (35 fleets), driver drowsiness and distraction recognition systems (6 fleets) and technology that monitors steering and braking patterns (45 fleets).

DRIVER EDUCATION

Key findings:

- More than a quarter (26%) of the fleets surveyed don't run any driver education/awareness sessions, either face-to-face or online, aimed at the topic of driver distraction in its various forms.

- Of those that do, 121 fleets instruct drivers to never use a phone when driving through their education/awareness sessions or written communications; 28 fleets tell drivers to turn their phone off or place it out of reach while driving.

Many organisations are failing to raise awareness about the dangers of distraction to both drivers and other road users through education sessions or written communications. For those organisations that do implement driver awareness sessions on distraction, the most popular topics include the danger of mobile phones and other distractions (117 fleets); the use of hand-held or hands-free phones at the wheel (100 fleets); and smoking at the wheel (90 fleets).

Other topics that are covered, but less commonly, include switching off mobile phones while driving, checking telematics data when driving and grooming at the wheel.

In addition, many organisations limit their ability to communicate with their employees on the dangers of distraction; they fail to take advantage of modern communications channels such as the company intranet (47% of respondents never use this technology) and mobile apps, which 57% of respondents say they never use. By and large, organisations prefer instead to rely on communication with managers via regular team briefings or small workshop sessions.

ADVICE: PREVENTING DRIVER DISTRACTION

It's vital for all organisations that employ at-work drivers to raise awareness among their employees about the dangers of distracted driving and introduce measures to mitigate that risk. Fleet managers can tackle the risk of driver distractions by:

- Educating drivers on key distraction risks including mobile phones, sat navs, eating and drinking, loud music and conversation with passengers;
- Having appropriate policies in place to guard against distractions, for example banning the use of hand-held and hands-free mobile phones while driving;
- Supporting drivers to abide by these policies, for example by allowing adequate time on journeys to take lunch breaks, rather than eating at the wheel;
- Enforcing best practice policies consistently, for example by carrying out spot checks of vehicles for cigarette ash or food debris, and taking disciplinary action against drivers who violate policies;
- Communicating policies to suppliers, customers and other contacts, to manage expectations (for example, that drivers will not receive calls at the wheel) and spread best practice throughout the supply chain;
- Running anonymous staff surveys to measure engagement with road safety messages and compliance with policies; and
- Lobbying local and national governments for changes to road safety laws on distractions, for example an outright ban on hand-held or hands-free mobile phone use while driving.

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