# Fleet survey report 2013

## Part 3: driver distraction

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Brake provides guidance for fleet managers to help them manage their road risk through its Fleet Safety Forum. This report contains results of a Brake survey of fleets' management of driver distraction, and gives guidance on reducing associated risks.

220 organisations responded to this survey of fleets, operating fleets of all sizes and vehicle types, and responsible for thousands of drivers and vehicles around the globe. Respondents included subscribers and non-subscribers to Brake's Fleet Safety Forum.[1]

For fleet drivers, driving is likely to be the most dangerous activity they do on a daily basis. Even a momentary lapse in concentration can have devastating consequences. Distractions such as mobile phones are proven to severely impair driving ability, causing slower reaction times and difficulty controlling speed and lane position.[2] Other distractions such as eating and drinking, adjusting controls and smoking also increase crash risk.[3]

Previous surveys by Brake have found that large numbers of at-work drivers – more than non-work drivers – admit using a mobile phone at the wheel to call or text and admit to driving while stressed.[4] Managing distractions should therefore be a priority for fleet managers.

Roz Cumming,
Brake professional engagement manager



## Implementing effective mobile phone policies

Almost all fleet managers surveyed (98%) take some form of action on mobile phone risk. Almost three in 10 (28%) have banned all mobile phone use, including hands-free, while driving. However almost half (48%) of fleets have built-in communication devices in their vehicles, such as two-way radios or built-in hands-free kits, and only one in three (35%) of these instruct drivers not to use them while driving.

One in seven (14%) employers surveyed monitor phone use to ensure compliance with their policies, and nearly six in 10 (58%) educate drivers on the dangers of using a mobile phone while driving.

Managers of fleets containing trucks or buses are much more likely to monitor mobile phone use to ensure drivers adhere to company policy. 39% of managers of large vehicles do this, compared to just 6% of managers of fleets containing only cars, vans and motorcycles.

Action from fleet managers on this risk is welcome, as international research shows that drivers who talk on a phone, hand-held or hands-free, are four times more likely to be in a crash that causes injury.[5] Drivers on phones have slower reaction times and worse speed control, while those speaking to passengers perform nearly as safely as drivers with silent passengers.[6] Texting while driving is even more dangerous as it takes your mind and eyes off the road. Texting drivers take twice as long to react to hazards, including while using a voice-to-text system.[7]

### CLEAR POLICIES ARE VITAL

In 2012, a driver for Coca-Cola Refreshments USA turned into oncoming traffic while talking on a hands-free mobile phone, seriously injuring another driver. Coca-Cola was ordered to pay more than $21 million in damages.
The judge ruled that the company's mobile phone policy, which allowed drivers to use a hands-free mobile phone at the wheel "when necessary", was too ambiguous.
The court also heard that Coca-Cola knew of the dangers of using any type of mobile phone at the wheel, but withheld this information from company drivers.[8]

### ADVICE FOR MANAGERS

Brake recommends fleet managers not only ensure their drivers comply with legal requirements on hand-held phone use in countries such as the UK where it is banned, but implement a complete ban on phone use at the wheel, in light of research showing that using a hands-free phone is equally dangerous. Drivers should be instructed to only use their phones when safely parked.

Fleet managers should educate drivers on the risks of mobile phone use at the wheel, and communicate clearly the reasons for the ban. Any resistance from drivers can usually be overcome by reminding them that calls at the wheel are not as professional-sounding or effective as calls while stationary, and providing guidance on effective communications without needing to make or take calls while driving. For example, drivers can divert phones to colleagues in the office, or set up voicemail explaining that they cannot take calls when driving but will return the call within two hours, ensuring they take regular breaks to return any missed calls.

It is important that fleet managers lead by example, never using their own phones while driving or expecting drivers to answer calls at any time. All employees should also be briefed to end calls immediately if the person they have phoned is driving. This policy should be communicated to suppliers, clients and other contacts, so they know employees will not receive a call when driving, or continue a call with someone who is driving.

To ensure adherence to mobile phone policies, managers can spot-check phone records. There are also smartphone apps available to disable phone use while driving, while some forms of telematics include in-vehicle cameras. Anonymous questionnaires can help to determine levels of compliance, as well as measuring driver attitudes towards the policy.



## TEXTING KILLS

*Left-right: Jade Beale, Arianna Ashworth and Renee Beale*

In December 2011, a crash in New Zealand caused by a texting driver killed one woman and seriously injured three others.

Renee Beale (21) was driving home with her sister Jade (25) and her friend Arianna Ashworth (21) when they were hit head-on by a driver who had crossed the central line. The driver of the other car, who died at the scene, had been texting at the wheel. Renee, Jade and Arianna all suffered serious injuries. Renee's femur split in half, requiring reconstructive surgery; Jade suffered ten broken ribs, a broken sternum and collarbone, and serious internal injuries; and Arianna needed surgery on injuries to her face.

Jade, Renee and Arianna now run a campaign to educate people of the dangers of using a mobile phone while driving. Jade says: "The crash didn't just affect us: it affected our family, friends, and our community. A couple of seconds of inattention can cause so much damage – the text can wait."

## Using in-vehicle technology safely

In-vehicle technology is reasonably common among fleets surveyed: 34% have sat navs installed in company vehicles and 38% use telematics systems to monitor driver behaviour and improve safety. However many do not have risk management policies on this technology: less than half (48%) of managers of fleets with sat navs require that drivers not adjust these while driving.

These systems can benefit driver safety. Satellite navigations systems can prevent the stress of getting lost and free drivers from having to study a map, as well as reducing congestion delays, and telematics provide valuable data to help managers monitor and address driver risk. However, the lack of risk management in this area is concerning, as most studies on distraction from in-vehicle information systems have found using any type of system while driving can affect driving performance.[9]

Sat navs can become a danger if drivers are distracted by adjusting them or become over reliant on them and reduce observation of what's around them.[10] For example, in July 2013 a woman was convicted in an English court of causing death by dangerous driving. She hit and killed a cyclist, failing to see him while she was programming her sat nav.[11]

Drivers should not unthinkingly follow directions from a sat nav. There have been many reported cases of drivers crashing after following incorrect sat nav instructions and ignoring or missing warning signs. In April 2008 a bus driver in Washington, USA, crashed into a bridge, injuring several passengers. He had been following his sat nav and failed to spot signs warning of the bridge's low height.[12]

Managers should also consider whether too much in-vehicle feedback from telematics devices could cause distraction. Some experts have voiced concern that over-use of visual or audio alerts may overload drivers.[13] Current research is looking into haptic feedback (e.g. vibration through the seat, steering wheel or pedals) to provide an alternative source of driver information.[14]

### ADVICE FOR MANAGERS

Brake recommends fleets have clear policies in place to prevent employees from adjusting in-vehicle devices while driving, and educate drivers on the risks of doing so. Journey planning should include sufficient time for drivers to set sat navs and familiarise themselves with the route before setting off.

Managers implementing telematics to improve safety should select systems that aren't likely to overload the driver, causing a distraction.

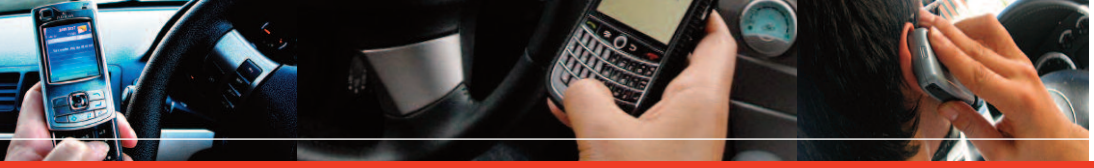
### Case study Cummins protects drivers from distraction

Cummins designs, manufactures and services engines and power generators. It operates globally in more than 190 countries, with a fleet of approximately 18,000 vehicles.

The company has a robust policy to prevent driver distraction by mobile phones and other technologies, implemented in 2007 throughout the company's worldwide operations. Drivers are not permitted to use any hand-held or hands-free phone or other communication device while the vehicle is moving. If a driver needs to make or take a call, they must first pull over somewhere safe - not the hard shoulder or side of the road.

Cummins drivers are instructed not to use or adjust any electronic equipment while driving. Satellite navigation systems are allowed, but drivers must set their route before setting off, and never adjust them while driving. Passengers in Cummins vehicles are allowed to use mobile phones and other devices, providing their use does not distract the driver.

**Continued→**





## Case study Cummins protects drivers from distraction (Continued)

When the policy was introduced, there was initially some resistance from drivers. However, over the years it has become an accepted part of the company's culture. Clear guidance on the risk of driver distraction and the reasons behind the policy is provided through the company's online risk management training, which every employee must complete. The training includes endorsements from the company's senior management, who are required to complete the same training and lead by example. Regular internal communications ensure drivers are familiar with the policy and Cummins' expectations, and supported in complying with this.

Since introducing the policy, Cummins' crash rate has reduced and initial analysis suggests their work to reduce driver distraction has contributed.

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## Summary recommendations for fleets

To minimise the risk of driver distraction, Brake recommends fleet managers should:

- operate a total ban on use of mobile phones and other communication devices while driving, including hands-free;
- support this ban by educating drivers on the risks of mobile phone use and other distractions;
- lead by example, ensuring all managers abide by the policy and communicate this to their teams;
- if necessary, carry out spot checks on company phone records to ensure adherence;
- manage workplace communications so drivers are not expected to make or receive business calls while driving;
- communicate to external contacts the ban on making or taking calls while driving, so clients and suppliers know what to expect;
- educate all employees to end a call immediately if the person they are calling is driving;
- ensure drivers know not to adjust any installed in-vehicle technology while driving;
- allow sufficient time for drivers to study their route and set their sat nav before beginning a journey; and
- consider the risk of distraction from in-vehicle feedback when implementing a telematics system.

## Further reading

Brake has published guidance reports for fleet managers on avoiding distraction, including:

- Mobile phones (published 2011)
- Eliminating driver distractions (published 2009)
- Keeping your distance (published 2008)

These and our library of more than 50 similar reports are all available for free to Brake subscribers. Other subscriber benefits include: significant discounts on our seminars, webinars and conferences; one free webinar place per year; driver resources; and a regular e-bulletin of relevant road safety research and initiatives. Subscribe online, or contact Brake on +44 (0)1484 559909 or admin@brake.org.uk

## End notes

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14. See for example: Birrell, S.A., Young, M.S. and Weldon, A.M. (2013) Vibrotactile pedals : provision of haptic feedback to support economical driving. Ergonomics, 56(2), pp. 282-292.