

TEXTING DANGERS THE RISK INCREASES

By Jay Anderson

The motoring public began to understand the dangers of text messaging and driving after a horrific crash in June 2007, on a rural highway in upstate New York, claimed the lives of five young women, all recent high school graduates. Records indicate that someone in the vehicle sent a text message from the driver's cell phone 38 seconds before the first 911 call. For the past 2 ½ years the *Stay Alive Just Drive!* traffic safety program has been involved in driver education, so it was not surprising when a prestigious medical association issued a stern warning regarding the risks of texting.

The [American College of Emergency Physicians \(ACEP\)](#) recently issued an alert, warning that being distracted by text messaging at inappropriate times, such as crossing the street, can result in death or serious injury. People assume that driving while text messaging is the most dangerous. Physicians from around the country now cite rising reports of injuries involving texting-while-walking, bicycling, boating, rollerblading and jogging. Typical injuries include minor facial abrasions, twisted ankles, and lacerations; and, ER doctors reported two deaths, both in California, as a result of texting and walking into traffic.

According to Dr. Linda Lawrence, ACEP president, research shows that teenagers and young adults are the most prone to texting related injuries, although a growing number of adult users of iPhones, BlackBerrys, and other handheld devices has made texting-on-the-go a risk for all ages. Valerie Jarrett, Barack Obama's aide, fell off a curb a few weeks ago in Chicago as she typed away on her BlackBerry. Jarrett sprained her ankle but was lucky she didn't require medical attention. Reports received by the U.S. Consumer Products Safety Commission highlight two cases, one involving a 15-year-old female who suffered head and back injuries when she fell off a horse while texting and a 13-year-old girl who burned her arm, leg and abdomen because she attempted to text her friend while cooking noodles.

The biggest concern for bicyclists and pedestrians was the hazard of being run down by a distracted driver on a cell phone. Now drivers must be on the lookout for someone demonstrating a surprising lack of common sense as they try to "multitask" while walking or riding. Common sense isn't always common sense. We tend to believe we're capable of multitasking, but in fact we are not. Picture focusing on a task for a split second, then focus on another one, with a car moving 45 mph it only takes a second to become a statistic. *Awareness is the key to understanding how one second can change a life forever.*

This issue hits close to home for me, not because I text or multitask, but because my wife was out one morning on her power walk, walking against traffic on the shoulder when a young man on his cell phone ran off the road putting her in the ditch. He fled the scene leaving her with multiple fractures. The dangers of distractions became too real for all involved.

It's time to "wake up and smell the coffee" and learn something from this warning and follow the five tips provided by Dr. Lawrence:

- 1** Don't text or talk on the mobile phone in situations that require constant attention, such as walking in a busy area, cycling, sailing, rollerblading or playing sports.
- 2** Never text or use your cell phone while operating a motor vehicle or motorcycle, and be aware that though *hands free systems* can be helpful, they are not the solution.
- 3** Keep wireless devices in easily accessible areas of backpacks, purses, or loose pockets so you don't have to rummage around looking for the device and divert attention from other tasks.
- 4** Don't hesitate to ignore a call or message alert if it might interfere with whatever you're doing at the given time. There will be plenty of time to respond in a safer situation. Also consider turning off your cell phone before taking part in activities that require a high level of attention, like driving.
- 5** Be aware of your surroundings while using a mobile, never text or talk where doing so could lead to safety concerns.

To learn more about the dangers of distractions visit us on the web: www.sajd.org

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