Of the many dangers on the road, text messaging while driving is one that is entirely preventable. Putting down the phone when driving can prevent thousands of injuries and even death.

According to Students Against Destructive Decisions and Liberty Mutual Insurance Group, instant messaging and texting while driving tops the list of driver distractions. Evidence gathered by these organizations has suggested that more than 3,000 vehicle fatalities and about 300,000 collisions a year can be attributed to texting conversations while the vehicle is in motion.

The website Distraction.gov notes that, in 2010, 3,092 people were killed in crashes involving a distracted driver and an additional 416,000 were injured in motor vehicle crashes involving a distracted driver. Some people are now saying that texting while driving is equally as dangerous as driving while impaired by alcohol or drugs in terms of interfering with individuals' driving abilities.

Texting creates a crash risk 23 times greater than driving while not distracted, according to the United States Department of Transportation. Although it may seem like a driver's eyes are off the road for only a nominal amount of time, texting generally requires about four seconds, which is four seconds drivers are not looking at the road. At average driving speeds, that can mean driving about 360 feet, or the length of a football field, without looking.

But messaging while driving is not the only danger associated with phones and operating a motor vehicle. A study from Carnegie Mellon University found that using a cell phone while driving reduces the amount of brain activity associated with driving by almost 40 percent. Therefore, texting or simply speaking on a phone while driving involves a manual distraction, a visual distraction and a cognitive distraction. All of those distractions add up to trouble.

Many areas have banned the use of cell phones while driving. But such laws are difficult to enforce. A 2009 Pew Research study on teens and distracted driving found that nearly half of all people between the ages 12 to 17 have at one time ridden in a vehicle where the driver was engaged in texting. Fifty-two percent of phone-owning teens ages 16 to 17 said they have talked on a cell phone while driving.

In response to the rise of texting-while-driving accidents, some organizations have taken an eye-opening approach to educating drivers about the dangers of texting. In 2010, AAA of the Carolinas started airing an evening public service announcement showing graphic images of a teen driver texting then getting involved in a three-car accident. The ending slogan stated, “You drive, you text, you die.” Other campaigns focus on the positives instead of the negatives, with Facebook groups promoting people who choose not to text and drive.

Any activity that takes a driver’s attention away from the road can lead to accidents. This includes eating, changing radio stations or addressing unruly children in the back seat. Making an effort to reduce distractions—especially putting down the phone while in the car—can considerably reduce accident rates.

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