



TRAFFIC DEATHS IN CRASHES INVOLVING ALCOHOL OR CELL PHONE USE

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DIFFERENT DRIVING STYLES, SIMILAR DANGERS

A [2006 University of Utah study](#) found that while the driving styles of drunken drivers and drivers using cell phones differ, they both pose dangers.

"Drivers using a cell phone exhibited a delay in their response to events in the driving scenario and were more likely to be involved in a traffic accident," the study found. "Drivers in the alcohol condition exhibited a more aggressive driving style... With respect to traffic safety, the data suggest that the impairments associated with cell phone drivers may be as great as those commonly observed with intoxicated drivers."

ISSUE

Compare the number of people who died nationwide as the result of alcohol-impaired crashes with the number of people who died in crashes involving the use of cell phones. This report relies on national data from 2013, the most recent year for which information is available online.

SUMMARY

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), 10,076 people were killed nationwide in alcohol-impaired crashes in 2013 compared to 445 who died in fatal crashes involving the use of cell phones. The number of people who died in crashes involving cell phone use was about 4.4% of the number who died in alcohol-impaired crashes.

We have attached links to two NHTSA reports and to a 2006 University of Utah study that found that "the impairments associated with using a cell phone while driving can be as profound as those associated with driving while drunk."

FATALITIES IN ALCOHOL-IMPAIRED CRASHES

NHTSA considers drivers to be alcohol-impaired when their blood alcohol concentration (BAC) is at least .08 grams per deciliter. Any crash involving a driver with a BAC of .08 or higher is considered to be an alcohol-impaired crash. In 2013, 10,076 people were killed in alcohol-impaired crashes, or about 31% of the 32,719 U.S. traffic deaths that year. Of the 10,076 people who died, 6,515 (65%) were drivers with BACs of at least



.08. The other people who died in these crashes included 1,567 passengers in vehicles operated by drunken drivers (16%), 1,157 drivers of, or passengers in, other vehicles (11%), and 837 "non-occupants" (e.g., pedestrians) (8%).

NHTSA reports that fatalities in alcohol-impaired crashes decreased by 2.5 % between 2012 and 2013, continuing a trend in which such fatalities decreased by 23% between 2004 and 2013.

FATALITIES IN CRASHES INVOLVING CELL PHONE USE

NHTSA reported that 445 people (427 of whom were drivers) died in crashes in which drivers were talking on, listening to, or otherwise handling (e.g., dialing, texting on) a cell phone. This represents approximately 14% of the 3,154 people who died in all distracted driving crashes. NHTSA considers cell phone use while driving one of several distracted driving behaviors. Others include eating, reaching for a dropped object, restraining a pet, and adjusting vehicle controls.

Drivers under age 40 are more likely than older drivers to be involved in distracted driving fatal crashes, particularly those where cell phone use is a factor. In 2013, drivers ages 20 to 29 accounted for 23% of all fatal crashes. However, drivers in this age range accounted for 27% of all distracted drivers involved in fatal crashes and 38% of distracted drivers using cell phones in fatal crashes.

Similarly, drivers ages 15 to 19 accounted for only 6% of all fatal crashes, but 10% of distracted driving fatal crashes and 11% of distracted drivers using cell phones in fatal crashes.

NHTSA says that data on cell phone use must be viewed with caution because police accident reports vary greatly. Some accident reporting forms specifically include distraction as a factor to be recorded; other forms rely on police noting distractions in the crash narrative. NHTSA also said distracted driving crashes may be underreported because of drivers' reluctance to admit to police they were using a cell phone at the time of a crash.

LINKS

NHTSA Traffic Safety Facts, Alcohol-Impaired Driving:

<http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/Pubs/812102.pdf>

NHTSA Traffic Safety Facts, Distracted Driving 2013:

http://www.distraction.gov/downloads/pdfs/Distracted_Driving_2013_Research_note.pdf

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