

Texting while driving makes you 23 times more likely to crash

By Mark Ellis [29/07/2009](#) Mirror on Line UK

Texting while driving makes you 23 times more likely to crash, research revealed yesterday.

Motorists who send messages spend some five seconds focusing on their phones - at 55mph enough time to cover the length of a football pitch.

That makes texting more dangerous than dialing a phone or simply reaching for a handset, which both raise the chances of an accident six-fold.

Rich Hanowski, who headed the £3.6million study, said: "Texting is in its own universe of risk."

His team, who looked at 100 van and truck drivers over six million miles, said: "Talking/listening to a phone allowed drivers to maintain eyes on the road and were not associated with an increased safety risk to nearly the same degree.

"These results show conclusively that a real key to significantly improving safety is keeping your eyes on the road."

A hands-free set was no safer because drivers were still distracted when dialling and answering, experts at America's Virginia Tech Transportation Institute added.

In the UK, road users aged 18 to 29 are most likely to break the law against texting at the wheel. Some 28 per cent of them admit doing so, compared to 12 per cent of drivers of all ages.

A Government ad campaign in May highlighted the dangers.

Using a hand-held mobile while driving has been illegal since 2003, with a fixed penalty of a £60 fine and three points. But if the case goes to court that can rise to a road ban and a £2,000 fine.

There is currently no separate offence of texting at the wheel.

Road safety minister Paul Clark said yesterday: "Tough penalties and hardhitting campaigns have got the message through to the majority of drivers.

"But some are still needlessly risking their own lives and putting others in danger for the sake of a text or a call.

"Our message is simple: don't use your mobile when driving."

However, the law is more lax in the US, with only 14 of 50 states having outlawed texting while driving.

Mr Hanowski's team wants other states to follow suit and all phone use banned for newly qualified drivers.

His colleague Tom Dingus said of motorists who sent texts: "You should never do this. It should be illegal."

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Brit motorists caught speeding in France or not wearing seatbelts now face roadside drug tests, the AA warned yesterday.

Those testing positive could be jailed for up to two years or fined £3,900. Failing a breathtest carries a maximum three years' jail and £7,800 fine.

The AA's Andrew Howard said: "Drivers who take drugs days or even weeks before driving through France are taking a high-stakes gamble."

28% of 18 to 29 year old drivers text at the wheel despite 2003 laws which banned using a mobile while driving.

£60 plus three penalty points is the fixed penalty. If the case goes to court it can rise to a ban and £2,000 fine.

92% agree that sending a text message while driving is dangerous... but 12% admit they have done it.

CASE STUDY

Driver who killed as she used phone

Waitress Philippa Curtis, 21, caused tragedy when she killed another driver as she texted while driving her car.

She was jailed for 21 months earlier this year after ploughing into the back of a stationary vehicle at 70mph.

Curtis, of Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, had sent and received 20 messages before the accident, which left Victoria McBryde, 24, of Horton, Northants, dead.

She was convicted of causing death by dangerous driving following a trial at Oxford crown court and was disqualified from driving for three years.

In court, she admitted sending text messages while driving but denied using her mobile at the time of the collision.

She said she felt there were times when using a phone while driving was acceptable and claimed she could send and receive messages without taking her eyes off the road.

Curtis said she was "hyper" as she set off to see her boyfriend.

She also admitted making several phone calls before colliding with Victoria's Peugeot on the A40 near Wheatley, Oxon, in November 2007.