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Lol no im nt bsy im only driving

Pittsburgh - We learn to stay away from the hot stove at about age 2-3. "Don't do that, you will get hurt," a concerned parent says sharply. And, yet, not really sure if its true, our little selves reach up ever so close enough to a coil to see how very hot it is, and only then, do we run away. Knowing what not to do and the temptation to do it anyway has been an ongoing human behavioral trait. We are frequently reminded that driving distractions cause accidents; and accidents kill.

Over the years, local and state governments have enacted countless laws to 'protect' drivers and pedestrians alike. It's the law to buckle up, to have children in appropriate child restraint systems, to not drink and drive, to obey the speed limit, and to wear helmets in most (but not all) states when operating a motorcycle; but what good is a law when many dismiss or overlook it and have a "that doesn't apply to me" attitude?

So it goes with texting. In 2009, textsmart.org surveyed young adults between the ages 18-24. The survey asked "Do you text while driving"? Of the 200 young men and women (73 female and 127 male) who answered the survey, 40% of the females and 39% of the males stated that they text while driving, more than they should. Other research shows that it only takes a distraction of four seconds to cause a major driving disaster. This may seem like an insignificant amount of time but FlowData.com's interactive driving game shows that 4 seconds is the average time a driver's eyes leave the road when reading or writing a text message. To put that time in perspective, when travelling 55 mph a driver would cover the length of a football field in 4 seconds!

The American Medical Association says that texting while driving constitutes a public health risk and increases the amount of time the driver's eyes are off the road by 400%. This is an alarming figure. Additionally, a recent report released by the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute found that when drivers texted, their collision risk was 23 times greater than drivers who kept their eyes on the road and their thumbs on the wheel.

What are our lawmakers doing about it? Several local municipalities and state governments have passed legislation that prohibits texting while driving. Several other states, such as Pennsylvania and Ohio are currently reviewing legislation that will make it illegal to use hand-held devices while driving. That's right; that includes a cell phone, Blackberry, "smart" phone, i-Phone, and that wonderful new i-Pad. In an attempt to help remedy the problem some U.S. automobile makers have installed voice control mechanisms that allow drivers to operate electronic devices without taking their eyes off the road. Below is a list of 10 states with the toughest penalties against distracted driving.

1. Utah: This state with the toughest penalties passed a law making the penalty for texting behind the wheel up to 3 months in jail and a \$750 fine. If the violation causes injury or death, drivers face up to 15 years in jail and a \$10,000 fine.
2. New Hampshire: If a driver causes harm to another driver or pedestrian because of distraction by texting, fines can reach \$1,000 and a 1 year license suspension.
3. Washington: The first state to ban texting while driving, Washington imposes a \$101 fine on drivers who are caught writing or reading a message while operating a vehicle.
4. New Jersey: Drivers in this state found guilty of using a handheld cell phone not only for texting - but also for talking or emailing -- are subject to a \$100 fine for first-time offenses.

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5. Mississippi: Any driver caught texting while driving will be imposed a \$500 fine; the fine doubles to \$1,000 if an accident of any kind is involved.
6. California: Motorists in California are banned from texting at any time while operating a vehicle - which means that they also can be fined for texting at stoplights.
7. Louisiana: Drivers are fined \$175 for the first offense and \$500 for the second offense. Like other states, the fines are doubled if the driver is in violation of the law when the accident occurs.
8. New York: After a texting-related accident killed 4 teenage drivers, New York enacted a law banning texting while driving. However, texting is a secondary offense which means that a police officer would first have to stop the driver for another illegal behavior - speeding, for instance - before citing the texting offense.
9. Tennessee: Drivers in this state are imposed a \$50 fine for texting while driving, and the state legislature is looking at stiffer penalties for repeat offenders.
10. Virginia: A \$20 fine for the first offense is imposed on Virginia drivers. **For teen drivers, using a cell phone at all while driving is strictly prohibited.**

These laws are a step in the right direction. However, enforcement, compliance and personal accountability are paramount. Unlike most other vehicular laws, texting is something most police enforcement personnel can't actually see. Even though we know the dangers - we have read about the deaths, and preventable accidents, and we know about the penalties. But what will it actually take for us to stop? How about simply taking the temptation away during your drive time, and focusing on driving carefully and arriving safely to your destination? It's really that simple of a choice.

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