

MEDIA RELEASE



People driving themselves to distraction with text messages

April 5, 2007: Driving at Easter while sending and receiving text messages would be like driving blindfolded for 12 seconds of every 30-second text message on busy roads during the peak holiday period.

The Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association (AMTA), Chris Althaus, said it was alarming that 30% of drivers had admitted they engaged in the illegal and dangerous practice of sending and receiving text messages.

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Research for the NRMA found that young drivers had their eyes off the road for 40% of the time when they were reading and sending text messages. This equated to drivers spending about 12 seconds of each 30 second period with their eyes off the road.

Driver research by the insurance company AAMI found almost a third (29%) of people admitted they often sent or read text messages while driving.

Mr Althaus said: "It is an extremely dangerous practice and puts others on the road at risk. It is very disturbing that some people claim they did not know that driving while text messaging is against the law.

"It is like driving blindfolded because a driver sending a text message for one minute in a car travelling at 100kph would travel a total of 660 metres with his or her eyes off the road, which is obviously extremely dangerous."

Mr Althaus said drivers faced a range of distractions, which had been found to be one of the main causes of accidents around the world. In the United States the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration had estimated that 20 to 30% of all fatal car accidents occur, in part, because the driver was distracted.

An American Automobile Association study analysed more than 32,000 traffic accidents caused by various driver distractions and found drivers were most often distracted by something outside their vehicle (29.4 percent), followed by adjusting a radio or CD player (11.4 percent), talking with other occupants (10.9 percent), adjusting vehicle or climate controls (2.8 percent), eating or drinking (1.7 percent), mobile phones (1.5 percent) and smoking (0.9 percent).

Mr Althaus said: "Drivers must be aware that trying to stop the kids arguing in the back seat, changing a CD, eating or sipping coffee, using a hand-held mobile phone or staring at a billboard can interfere with the task of driving.

"Any activity that takes a driver's mind off driving, their hands off the wheel or eyes off the road is dangerous. Safety is the most important call that drivers can make this Easter."

AMTA's safety tips to assist drivers this Easter are at <http://www.amta.org.au/default.asp?Page=295>

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