

Study: 74% of Americans admit to distracted driving, 19% using web

On behalf of Johnston, Moore & Thompson

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An unscientific survey released by State Farm found that 74 percent of Americans admit talking on cell phones while driving at least once a week, 35 percent admitted texting while driving at least that frequently, and an astonishing 19 percent said they surfed the Internet while behind the wheel. According to data from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, distracted driving was responsible for 5,474 fatal accidents and 448,000 [car accident](#) injuries in 2009.

Teen drivers are the most likely group to engage in distracted driving, according to NHTSA.

"That 19% might be underestimating the actual use of smart phones to access the Internet while driving, because the majority of the respondents were in the age range of the 30s," said Cindy Garretson, State Farm's director of auto technology research.

State Farm's numbers are based on a survey of 912 licensed drivers in November 2010. The insurance giant plans a more extensive study this year.

Most who admit Internet use while driving say they only do so in stopped traffic, but the danger remains

According to a report in USA TODAY, most drivers who surf the web while in control of a motor vehicle only do so when stopped at traffic lights or when otherwise stopped in traffic.

"I don't read in-depth stuff, but I Web and drive," one 38-year-old Illinois driver told USA TODAY. "I'll check different stuff about sports. I'm not saying it's the smartest thing in the world ... but I guess I just do it anyway."

While it may seem harmless to pass time at a traffic light by playing with a cell phone, most state legislatures don't think it is. So far, 38 states have banned texting or surfing the Internet behind the wheel -- 30 of those for all drivers. In most cases, the laws prohibit the activities whenever a driver is in control of a vehicle.

Overconfidence leads many to ignore the risks and cause car accidents

"I think our generation is just so technologically advanced, and we need to keep in touch all the time," a 16 year-old from Florida told USA TODAY. Also, teen drivers -- and adults, too -- often believe they are so skilled at texting that it's not that dangerous. What would it take to change their minds?

"The easy answer would be an accident or near-accident," said an adult driver from Illinois. "But part of me wonders, depending on how bad it would be, if even that would do it. I think it's one of those things where you just don't think anything's going to happen."

Nearly being in car accident convinced the Florida teen to change his behavior.

"I was updating my status, telling everybody where I was going," he said. "I was still looking at my phone, trying to look at the road at the same time."

"It scared me so much, I don't text and drive or Facebook and drive anymore, or do anything with my phone."

He is to be commended for the change. Let's hope it doesn't take a car accident to convince anyone else that cell phone use, texting, and especially using the Internet while driving is a bad idea.

Source: USA TODAY, "[19% admit Web use while driving](#)," Larry Copeland, March 2, 2010