



# HEAD IN THE GAME

Combating distracted driving means more than putting down the phone

Across Canada, Canadians' perspectives on distracted driving are evolving and it remains a top concern according to a recent Canadian Automobile Association poll.

"Distracted driving is becoming socially unacceptable but vigilant law enforcement and ongoing education remain crucial," says Ian Jack, managing director, communications and government relations, CAA, Ottawa. "People need to know that something bad could actually happen to them."

According to the Traffic Injury Research Foundation, distracted driving deaths have surpassed impaired driving deaths and the RCMP reports that driver distraction is a factor in about four million motor vehicle crashes in North America annually. In addition, the National Highway Traffic

Safety Administration finds that driver inattention contributed to 80 per cent of collisions and 65 per cent of near crashes.

"Distracted driving has been the number-one killer for the past five years and inattention is the leading factor in all types of collisions," says Kerry Schmidt, Sergeant, OPP Highway Safety Division.

As a result, all 10 provinces have some form of cell phone-distracted driving legislation in place. The penalties typically comprise a fine and demerit points, ranging from a low of \$80 in Quebec to a high of \$1,200 in PEI. In select provinces, fines increase for second and third offenses and demerit points range from three to five depending on the province.

"While legislation in many jurisdictions has focused almost exclusively on electronic

communication devices, legislation in some jurisdictions such as Alberta has prohibited a broader range of distractions, (such as reading, sketching, programming an audio player, excessive interaction with a pet, using video entertainment displays and personal grooming) and other jurisdictions are starting to consider such an approach," says Robyn Robertson, president and CEO, Traffic Injury Research Foundation.

### Not just digital devices

Distracted driving is most often associated with digital devices that take eyes off the road and hands off the wheel, but any activity that affects a driver's ability to safely operate a motor vehicle is distracted, careless driving.

"It's more about what your brain is

thinking than what your hands and eyes are doing," says Jack. "Hands-free does not equal distraction-free!"

As the OPP's Schmidt points out, it's human nature to have an optimistic bias regarding our driving abilities. Most drivers would consider themselves above average drivers and when they have driven collision-free for decades, they typically see this history as proof they are good drivers.

However, Eliot Bensel, vice-president, account development, at fleet management company Element Fleet, asks: "Are you good? Or are you lucky? Virtually every person, on the road and elsewhere, makes mistakes, massive or minor. The

ing videos and live action sports, texting, searching and engaging with likes, comments and shares to social media.

"Motor vehicle collisions are the leading cause of workplace death and that's why innovative, industry leading, safety-minded firms are committing to Cellcontrol which saves one life annually for every 5,000 subscribers," says Joe Boyle, CEO and cofounder, Cellcontrol, Lisle, Illinois.

Fleet managers can customize Cellcontrol settings to block everything but 911 and other emergency calls; allow only Bluetooth-enabled and emergency calls; and support only such calls and nav-

unfocused?" says Boyle.

Increasingly, fleets' telematics systems monitor drivers' behaviours to determine whether the driver requires more training and education or is chronically inattentive and lazy. Element's Meiklejohn notes a large oil and gas company, although initially wary of the reaction from its unionized drivers, ultimately introduced telematics for safety's sake.

"They presented telematics as a safety strategy designed to protect drivers rather than watch their every move," says Meiklejohn. "It's about changing the bad habits that have become ingrained since we started driving in our teens and helping drivers alter behaviours and improve skills whether or not they realize they need it."

“Safety systems can't replace the driver's brain, eyes, hands and feet. A single second of inattention can result in a collision.” —IAN JACK, CAA



lucky ones get away with it!"

Fleet and risk managers need good, not lucky, drivers in view of the potential for multimillion-dollar liability suits when drivers are on company business or in a company-provided vehicle using company-supplied tools.

They create, implement and fully support driver and technology-related policies to mitigate the risk to the company and protect its most valuable resources, its employees, brand and reputation, and hard assets such as vehicles. Consequences to drivers in the event of a collision in which technology was involved may include dismissal or the loss of the vehicles and digital devices.

"It has to be punitive and it has to scare them," says John Meiklejohn, national account manager at Element. "The telecom providers can tell us exactly what the driver was doing and when, and that ability to monitor driver behaviour is extremely powerful."

Beyond their distracted driving and digital technology policies, fleet managers do limit and control access with tools like Cellcontrol simply because the most appalling behaviour can include watch-

igational apps.

"About 90 per cent of our fleets have formal technology policies, but fewer than 10 per cent actively enforce and support them with tools like Cellcontrol, due to concerns about everything from costs to productivity," says Bensel.

To date, Cellcontrol has over 100,000 subscribers in Canada, the US, the UK and Australia and their customers report an immediate 40 per cent collision reduction, which delivers a five-to-one return on the investment. In fact, a North American pest control company will save \$US5.8 million annually in direct collision-related costs. Companies must consider the potential return-on-investment due to insurance, repair/replacement, lost-time (human and vehicular) and benefits reductions as well as the potentially enormous liability cost in a worst-case scenario.

In view of its productivity concerns, a global pharmaceutical company had its top sales rep test Cellcontrol and discovered his productivity actually increased.

"Aside from the fact taking calls and answering emails while driving is egregiously unsafe and irresponsible, how productive can a driver truly be while so

### Vehicle safety

Fortunately, vehicles are the safest they've ever been to mitigate the effects of poor driving, and the OEMs' high-tech safety features have trickled down to entry-level vehicles. Automatic emergency braking, adaptive cruise control, blind-spot monitoring, lane-departure warning and lane-keeping assist, rear cross-traffic alert, front- and rear-end collision avoidance and other features can all be effective.

But Jack, Bensel and John Meiklejohn, all stress drivers need to really understand these features' capabilities and must guard against becoming overly dependent on them.

"Even collectively, these safety systems can't replace the driver's brain, eyes, hands and feet," says Jack. "A single second of inattention can result in a collision."

A few years ago, a large security firm noticed its safety statistics had plateaued and the collision rate was holding steady despite the company's policies, training and more. Having exhausted the most traditional approaches, the executives worked with their employees to create testimonials. One driver talked about rear-ending a vehicle with a woman and child as occupants while reaching for a water bottle. The mother survived, the child died.

"The testimonials really resonated and stuck with me and since the company's collision rates dropped a few points, I wasn't the only one," says Bensel. **B2B**