It is a 21st century fact of life: motorists use cell phones when driving.

A recent national survey found that roughly three of every four motorists say they talk on the phone in their cars and another one in five admits to text messaging when they are behind the wheel.

Drivers
Texting or talking on cell phones

Drivers talking on cell phones look, but often fail to SEE what is around them. Drivers will look directly at objects around them, but are less likely to remember what they have seen when they are talking on the phone. They also are more likely to miss traffic signals and often fail to see signs and exit ramps. Driver reaction to vehicles braking in front of them can be impaired. Researchers observing more than 1,700 drivers found that three of every four drivers using cell phones committed a traffic violation. The number dropped to one of every five drivers when cell phones were not in the picture.

People who use cell phones while driving are four to five times more likely to be in injury-causing traffic crashes.

Bluetooth
Versus hand-held phones

Safety experts point out that talking on a cell phone distracts a motorist from paying full attention to driving. While a growing number of drivers are turning to Bluetooth headsets or other hands-free devices, many studies have concluded that hands-free cell phones are not any safer to use while driving than hand-held devices. It is the conversation rather than holding a phone that brings special risks.

More than 80% of Americans now have a cell phone, up from 11% in 1995.
Cellular Telecommunications and Internet Association, 2007

It’s the law...

A jurisdiction-wide ban on driving while talking on a hand-held cell phone is in place in 9 states (California, Connecticut, Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Utah, and Washington) and the District of Columbia. Utah has named the offense careless driving. Under the Utah law, no one commits an offense when speaking on a cell phone unless they are also committing some other moving violation other than speeding.
Local jurisdictions may or may not need specific state statutory authority to ban cell phones. Localities that have enacted restrictions on cell phone use include: Oahu, HI; Chicago, IL; Brookline, MA; Detroit, MI; Santa Fe, NM; Brooklyn, North Olmstead, and Walton Hills, OH; Conshohocken, Lebanon, and West Conshohocken, PA; Waupaca County, WI; and Cheyenne, WY.

The use of all cell phones while driving a school bus is prohibited in 19 states and the District of Columbia.

The use of all cell phones by novice drivers is restricted in 28 states and the District of Columbia.

Text messaging is banned for all drivers in 30 states and the District of Columbia. In addition, novice drivers are banned from texting in 8 states (Alabama, Indiana, Maine, Mississippi, Missouri, Oklahoma, Texas, and West Virginia) and school bus drivers are banned from text messaging in 2 states (Oklahoma, and Texas).


In 2009, Austin, Texas amended their city code to prohibit electronic messaging while driving. The new ordinance (#20091022-028) states that:

"A driver of a motor vehicle may not use a wireless communication device to view, send, or compose an electronic message or engage other application software while operating a motor vehicle."

The new ordinance does not prohibit talking or dialing a cell phone or engaging in the prohibited behavior while a vehicle is stopped, emergency situations or affect GPS interaction. http://www.drivinglaws.org/texas.php

A car should not be the gateway to the Internet.

Look at the Facts:
11% percent of drivers are talking on their phones at any given time, according to a federal study (NYT)

2,600 traffic deaths are caused each year by drivers using cell phones, according to a Harvard study (NYT)

570,000 accidents leading to minor and serious injuries are caused each year by cell phone distractions, according to the same Harvard study (NYT)
Driven To Distraction

50% of Americans believe that texting behind the wheel should be punished at least as harshly as drunk driving (NYT/CBS Poll)

No teen needs in-car electronics and mobile connectivity.

In 2007, AAA reported that 21% of fatal car crashes involving teens between the ages of 16 and 19 were the result of cell phone usage. This result was expected to grow as much as 4% every year.

With numbers like that, it’s a wonder that one of the biggest innovations showcased in the 2010 Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas involves cars equipped with 10-inch high-definition screens that do anything from reading tweets aloud to uploading photos and videos to browsing the Internet.

The statistics on cell phone distractions already tell a devastating story, and many states have quickly moved to ban texting while driving. But as any parent -- or, for that matter, any auto insurance company -- knows, teens aren’t only the most dangerous drivers, but they’re also the most distractable.

What parents CAN do.

Talk to your teens NOW! Tell them that distracted driving is as dangerous as drinking and driving.

Tell them what their peers say:
87% of teens think that driving and texting is dangerous.
80% of teenage girls and 58% of teenage boys admitted to texting behind the wheel.
65% have asked someone to stop driving dangerously. The Allstate Foundation and National Organizations for Youth Safety May 2009

Set a good example:
Throw your cell phone into the back seat. Do not check your email at stoplights. If you must talk on the phone, use a hands-free headset.