

Distracted Drivers Hot Topic at State and Federal Level

Presentations on distracted drivers were heard by the House Transportation Committee this week, and U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood banned texting for commercial drivers.

Distracted driving is defined as the driver diverting attention away from activities critical for safe driving. Obviously, the longer and more frequently that a driver's eyes are off the road the more dangerous the situation.

According to information from the National Safety Council Group, 800,000 people in the country are using a cell phone at any one time. Each year, there are 1.6 million crashes in the country attributed to the use of a cell phone. Of that 1.6 million, 200,000 are caused due to a driver texting.

Federal Texting Ban

Secretary LaHood, through federal rules, made it illegal for some commercial vehicle drivers to text while driving. The ban applies to interstate commercial drivers and commercial van drivers. Federal government employees are already banned from texting while driving when they are using government-provided cell phones or cars, or when they are using their own cell phone or car to conduct government business.

The rules concerning commercial drivers went into effect on January 26, and the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration will be working on details of the rules. Violators could be faced with civil or criminal penalties up to \$2,750.

Studies done by the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute show that a truck driver who texts is 23% more likely to have a crash.