

DRIVING WHILE DISTRACTED (DWD): THE NEXT DUI?

Did you know that recent studies show that Driving While Distracted (DWD) is considerably more dangerous than DUI? Whether it's on the roads of Atlanta or New York City, Americans increasing their use of cell phones, navigation devices and even laptops while driving, are making our roads more dangerous.



You don't have to tell Christopher Hill of Oklahoma about the dangers of DWD. In September, 2008, at age 16, he was so engrossed in a cell phone call that he failed to see a red light, crashing into Linda Doyle, killing her instantly. Or Sgt. Matthew Downing, an 11 years on the Oklahoma City police force. He increasingly sees erratic behavior-swerving across lanes, running red lights- that looks just like drunk driving. Instead he sees the drivers talking on their phones, or texting, oblivious to their surroundings. Or relatives of the 25 people recently killed when a California commuter train engineer ran a red light while texting.

Or Reggie Shaw, a 19-year-old Utah college student who was driving to work in a Chevrolet Tahoe S.U.V. Approaching him, in a Saturn sedan, was James Furaro, 38, and his passenger, Keith P. O'Dell, 50. The senior scientists were commuting to ATK Launch Systems, where they were helping to design and build rocket boosters. Mr. Shaw crossed the yellow dividing line on the two-lane road and clipped the Saturn. It spun across the highway and was struck by a pickup truck hauling a trailer filled with two tons of horseshoes and related equipment. The two scientists were killed instantly.

At the scene, the investigating officer, could not pinpoint the cause of the accident. But a witness told the police that Shaw had been swerving several times just before the accident; on the way to the hospital the trooper saw Shaw texting. After obtaining Shaw's phone records investigators found that Shaw and his girlfriend had texted each other 11 times within the 30 minutes before the crash. Shaw was eventually prosecuted in Utah for careless or reckless driving. As a result of this case, Utah just passed the country's first law making it a felony for causing a death while driving while texting, with maximum punishment up to 15 years!

The two biggest areas of DWD are driving while talking on a cell phone and driving while texting. Studies show that drivers using a phone are 4 times as likely to cause a crash as other drivers, and the likelihood of an accident is equal to that of someone who is legally drunk. Research also shows that hands free devices do not eliminate the risk and in fact may worsen the driving.

The issue is really whether the human brain is capable of safely operating a car while multitasking. Scientists note that there are limits on how much the brain can multitask. The brain has trouble assessing separate streams of information even if one is visual and the other audible. According to Steve Yantis, a professor of psychological and brain sciences at Johns Hopkins, "when people talk on the phone, they are doing more than simply listening. The words conjure up images in the mind's eye, including images of the person they are talking to. While that doesn't typically interfere with driving, when something happens unexpectedly, for instance a car swerves or a pedestrian steps into traffic, the mind lacks the processing power to react in time."

"There is zero doubt that one's driving ability is impaired when one is trying to have a cell phone conversation-whether hands free or hand held, it doesn't matter." David Meyer, professor of psychology at the University of Michigan.

Texting while driving is even more dangerous than driving while talking on a cell phone. In a study conducted by the University of Utah, texting drivers regularly focused on their screens, without looking at the roadway, for stretches of more than 5 seconds! Most drivers in the study, using a simulation game, crashed their cars while texting.

What to do about DWD? Only 5 states and DC have banned hand held use of cell phones. 14 states have passed measures banning texting while driving. That leaves most States without laws banning either texting or hand held use of cell phones while driving. Most of the fight against in car distraction has fallen to a small group of activists, many of whom have family members killed by distracted drivers. For my part, I now not only look both ways when entering an intersection, but also look behind me while stopped at a red light, because you never know when the person driving behind you is talking on their phone, texting, or searching their iPod playlist.



Have you checked out my blog?

defendingdriversrights.com

If you had, you might know about the man who got a DUI while going to the beer store on his lawnmower.

FOOTBALL SEASON IN ATHENS, GA: BEWARE OF ATHENS BIKE COPS!

September 11 is UGA's first home game, against South Carolina at 7pm. Many folks tailgate not only on the UGA campus but in down town Athens as well. Did you know that it is illegal to have an open container of alcohol in Athens, GA?



I didn't know that either until a couple of years ago when a friend and I were walking back to UGA campus from Athens Municipal parking. My friend had an open can of beer, when we were stopped by an Athens cop on a bicycle. While the cop was writing my friend a ticket, she was nice enough to tell them that he could go ahead and finish his beer. I later found out through an Open Records request that this is a big money maker for Athens; at the time each ticket required a \$75 fine, and it was understanding that the number of tickets handed out each year number in the thousands!

I wouldn't necessarily have a problem with this law in Athens, GA except for the fact that there are (to my knowledge) no warnings anywhere, and it also bothers me that you can be on one side of Broad Street with an open container and not be breaking the law, then walk across said street and be ticketed. Anyway now you know, so BE CAREFUL IN ATHENS!

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FOR MORE INFO, GO TO:

<http://decaturbierfestival.org/index.php>

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