

April 2023

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Distractions at Work

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Supervising Safety Newsletter

Distraacted Driving

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has dedicated the month of April to focus on distracted driving and habits that can put us in dangerous situations. Distracted driving has become one of the most deadly epidemics on our roads today. Distracted driving has no limits and occurs while people are at work on the job site or driving in their local communities. What constitutes distracted driving? The obvious answer to most is using a cell phone or texting. In reality distracted driving is anything that takes the concentration and focus of the driver off the road and inhibits their ability to safely operate a vehicle. The following is a short list of some of the most common forms of distraction:

- Reaching for an object in a vehicle
- Becoming focused on an object outside the vehicle
- Reading
- Applying makeup
- Adjusting the radio
- Eating
- Talking to passengers
- Wearing headphones/ listening to music

Distraacted While Working

Distracted driving isn't the only way we can put ourselves at serious risk by being distracted. When we are working, we can also be prone to a variety of distractions. Distractions while working with heavy equipment, power tools, ladders, at heights, and other tasks that require focus are some of the most dangerous. Employees should be focused on the task at hand and resist the temptation of outside distractions interrupting their work. This includes distractions such as:

- Texting or checking social media while working
- Talking to co-workers
- Browsing the internet/ checking email
- Wearing headphones when ear plugs should be worn
- Fatigue
- Multi-tasking
- Not following established rules, policies, and procedures

- Substance Abuse
- Eating or Drinking

Distractions can be broken into three main categories: visual, manual, and cognitive. Visual distractions are those that require a worker or driver to look away from the road or task they are doing to gather visual information on something happening around them. Manual distractions are tasks that require you to adjust, move, or manipulate a device that is not associated with your primary task. Examples of a manual distraction is reaching for an object while operating a vehicle or fidgeting with headphone volume while running equipment. Cognitive distractions involves taking your mind and focus off of the task at hand. Cognitive distractions include thinking about social media or texts messages.

The safety impact of distractions is dictated by the task being done and the workload on the individual. One study conducted by the NHTSA concluded that driver performance degrades when people try to multitask when driving, increasing the possibility of an accident occurring. This also applies to workers trying to juggle multiple tasks at the same time, leaving them vulnerable to a potential injury. The study also noted that reaction time decreased and visual scanning of surroundings narrowed. This presents clear evidence that distractions and trying to multitask can lead to accidents.

How to Avoid Distractions

We can all start by limiting our screen time and only checking texts and social media on breaks and at lunch. Plan out the tasks that are assigned and have clear goals to accomplish them. Avoid multitasking overload by focusing on one task at a time. Avoid fatigue by developing a sleep schedule and adhering to it. Devote your attention to the task at hand and put away distractions. It is your safety and those around you at risk.

