

## Distraction Tops Drivers' List of Growing Dangers on the Road

Distracted driving tops drivers' list of growing dangers on the road, according to a new survey from the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety. The annual Traffic Safety Culture Index shows that 88 percent of drivers believe distracted driving is on the rise, topping other risky behaviors like:

- Aggressive driving: 68 percent
- Drivers using drugs: 55 percent
- Drunk driving: 43 percent

The proportion of drivers who report talking on a cell phone regularly or fairly often when behind the wheel jumped 46 percent since 2013. Nearly half (49 percent) of drivers report recently talking on a hand-held phone while driving and nearly 35 percent have sent a text or email. Despite their behavior, nearly 58 percent of drivers say talking on a cellphone behind the wheel is a very serious threat to their personal safety, while 78 percent believe that texting is a significant danger. A recent study from the AAA Foundation shows drivers talking on a cellphone are up to four times as likely to crash while those who text are up to eight times as likely to be involved in a crash.

“With more than 37,000 deaths on U.S. roads in 2016, we need to continue finding ways to limit driving distractions and improve traffic safety,” said

Dr. David Yang, executive director of the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety. “The Foundation’s work offers insight on drivers’ attitudes toward traffic safety and their behaviors, so we can better understand the issue and identify potential countermeasures to reduce crashes.”



Drivers in the AAA survey believe the problem of distracted driving has increased over the past three years, with nearly 50 percent reporting that they regularly see drivers emailing or texting while driving. Counterintuitively, federal estimates show the number of distracted driving crashes has actually dropped two percent. This may be due to the fact that it is difficult to detect distraction following a crash which makes distracted driving one of the most underreported traffic safety issues. According to government estimates, distraction plays a factor in just 14 percent of all crashes. However, past AAA Foundation research looking into teen drivers (one of the most vulnerable driving populations), used in-vehicle dash-cam videos to determine that distraction was a factor in 58 percent of crashes, 44 percent more than federal estimates.



“As the number of distractions behind the wheel increases- from the latest phone apps to in-vehicle technology, it is important that we better educate drivers on the dangers of distraction,” said Jake Nelson, AAA director of traffic safety advocacy and research. “There is a disconnect between what drivers do and what they believe. While most recognize the dangers created by taking your eyes off the road, they engage in distracting behaviors anyway- creating a ‘do as I say, not as I do’ culture on the roadway.”

Any level of risk is too high when it comes to safe driving. Tasks that require a driver to take their eyes or attention off the road should be avoided while the vehicle is in motion- including the use of cellphones, infotainment systems, or navigation systems. AAA urges drivers to act responsibly when behind the wheel. In order to avoid distractions, drivers should:

- Put aside electronic distractions and never use text messaging, email, video games or internet functions, including those built into the vehicle, while driving.
- Pre-program your GPS and adjust seats, mirrors, climate controls and sound systems before driving.
- Properly secure children and pets and store loose possessions and other items that could roll around in the car.
- Snack smart by avoiding messy foods that can be difficult to manage.

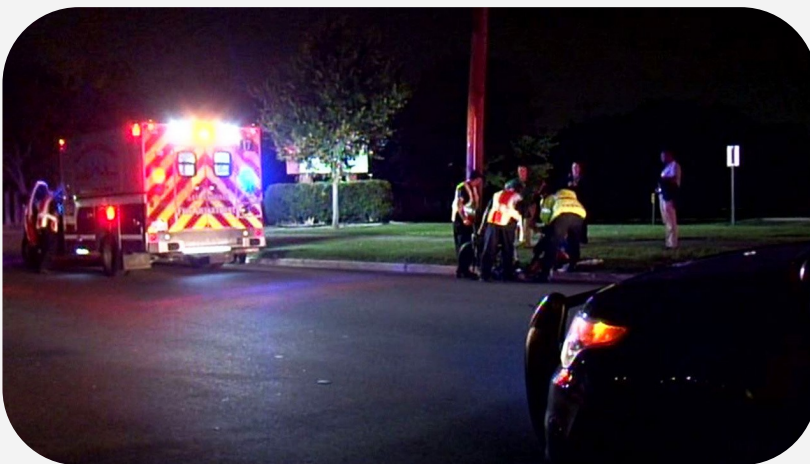
## Hit-and-Run Deaths Hit Record High

More than one hit-and-run crash occurs every minute on U.S. roads, according to new research from the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety. These resulted in 2,049 deaths in 2016 – the highest number on record and a 60 percent increase since 2009. With the number of hit-and-run crashes on the rise, AAA is calling for drivers to be alert on the road in order to avoid a deadly crash and always remain on the scene if a crash occurs.

AAA researchers examined common characteristics of hit-and-run crashes and found that:

- An average of 682,000 hit-and-run crashes occurred each year since 2006.
- Nearly 65 percent of people killed in hit-and-run crashes were pedestrians or bicyclists.
- Hit-and-run deaths in the U.S. have increased an average of 7.2 percent each year since 2009.
- Per capita, New Mexico, Louisiana and Florida have the highest rate of fatal hit-and-run crashes while New Hampshire, Maine and Minnesota have the lowest rates.

“Hit-and-run crashes in the United States are trending in the wrong direction,” said Dr. David Yang, executive director of the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety. “Our analysis shows that hit-and-run crashes are a growing traffic safety challenge and the AAA Foundation would like to work with all stakeholders to help curtail this problem.”



The report found that most victims of fatal hit-and-run crashes are pedestrians or bicyclists. Over the past 10 years, nearly 20 percent of all pedestrian deaths were caused by hit-and-run crashes, meanwhile just one percent of all driver fatalities in that same time period.

To decrease the chances of being involved in a crash with a pedestrian or bicyclist, drivers should:

- **Be aware:** Pedestrians may act unpredictably and can walk into the path of travel at any point.
- **Be cautious:** Look out for small children and be alert to areas where there are likely to be more pedestrians. These include school zones, playgrounds, bus stops and intersections.
- **Be patient:** When trying to pass a pedestrian or cyclist, give plenty of space and keep them in your line of sight.
- **Be vigilant:** Drivers should always yield to pedestrians, even if they walk into the road from an area other than a crosswalk.

“It is every driver’s legal and moral responsibility to take necessary precautions to avoid hitting a pedestrian, bicyclist or another vehicle,” said Jennifer Ryan, director of state relations for AAA. “While no one likes being involved in a crash, leaving the scene will significantly increase the penalties for drivers- whether they caused the crash or not.”

Currently, every state has laws that make it illegal for a driver involved in a crash to flee the scene. State penalties vary depending on the type of crash (i.e. property damage, injury, serious injury or a fatality). If found guilty, drivers can face large fines, lose their license or spend time in prison. AAA encourages drivers to educate themselves about specific hit-and-run laws in their state and remain alert on the road to prevent crashes from occurring.

If a driver is involved in a crash, they should never leave the scene and follow the steps below:

**Assist the injured**– Check for injured people and call 911.

**Be visible**– Make sure that the scene is visible to approaching drivers. If possible, move vehicles out of the path of traffic, and use hazard flashers, flares, and reflective triangles. Find a safe place to remain until emergency services arrive, if needed.

**Communicate**– Call the police and file a report. If the police do not come to the scene, you can file a report by visiting a local police department or your automobile insurance agency.

“By working together, we can bring awareness and identify potential solutions to reduce hit-and-run fatalities,” continued Dr. Yang. “We can’t forget that cars can be deadly when they come into contact with pedestrians, cyclists or other cars. It is incumbent on each and every one of us to stay alert, be aware of our surroundings and always stay on the scene if involved in a crash.”

Source: AAA

## Basic Rules of Firearms Safety: Why They Are Important and How to Put Them Into Practice

Statistics and research has shown that every firearm related incident is a violation of one or more of the following 4 basic rules of firearms safety.



The first rule is to treat every firearm as if is loaded. Put simply never assume a firearm is unloaded and even if you know it is do not treat it with any different respect than if it was loaded. Too many times a firearm has been handled and the person said, “ah, it’s not loaded” and then it discharged when the trigger was pulled. That is what is known as an unwanted discharge. It’s not an accidental discharge because it was not an accident that caused the firearm to go off; the trigger was pulled intentionally. Unwanted discharges shock everyone nearby. In the worst cases a person is injured or even killed.

Every time you handle a firearm do two things. First check to see if it is loaded by opening the action. If a person is handing you the firearm it’s even better if you have them open the action before you agree to accept it. The second thing is to check the safety and make sure that it is always on safe. This is a practice that should be conducted numerous times when handling a firearm. Safe hunters and shooters do this all the time and frequently when they are handling firearms. You cannot check the safety too many times to verify if it is on safe or not. I don’t mean play with it. I mean routinely check the safety once you first touch the firearm, then frequently while handling it and when you are just about to put it away or hand it off to someone else.

Respect is what this rule is all about. Respect for the firearm and what it can do. Respect for other people around you. Every one likes to know that you acknowledge their presence and are aware that safety is foremost on your mind. Respect for property. Firearms can and will do damage to property when discharged. The person handling the firearm is responsible for any and all damage done by the discharge. Proper handling and respect of firearms is necessary to be safe. Treat every firearm as if it is loaded. That means every firearm, every time, all the time.

## **Always Have An Escape Route While Driving**

One of the most important driving tips I can share with you is to always have an escape route. You should always assume the worst will happen and be prepared for it. Constantly ask yourself questions and make up possible scenarios in your head. Some examples:

What if the driver in front of you slams on his brakes for no apparent reason (an animal runs into the roadway, he blows a tire, etc.)?

What if the approaching vehicle drifts into your lane?

Will somebody run the red light or stop sign up ahead?

You should constantly be mentally asking yourself these kinds of questions while you drive. We already do this subconsciously, but actually thinking the situation through will make you much safer. Unfortunately, you are forced to share the road with people who don't take driving safety seriously. That's why you must always leave yourself an out in case the worst happens. Having an escape plan is crucial to your safety.

### **Leaving Yourself An Out**

As a real world example, you should try not to drive directly next to somebody. If someone pulls up beside you and matches their speed to yours, either speed up or slow down so that the lane next to you is clear. That way, if you need to swerve somewhere, you have a place to go. What if you can't use the lane next to you? Where will you go if something happens? Maybe the shoulder is an option. If not, you might need to increase your following distance so you have some additional stopping distance. Again, always have a plan!

### **Establish And Maintain A Buffer Zone**

If you are far enough behind the vehicle in front of you, swerving probably won't even be necessary. Swerving should actually be a last resort and if you are forced to swerve, that means you were following too closely. But you should always give yourself options. Have more than one escape route whenever possible. That means not only keeping a safe following distance, but also keeping the side of your vehicle free from obstructions.

## Motorcycle Safety Tips for First-Time and Returning Riders

Motorcycles are fun and fuel efficient. That's not news to anyone who's ridden one. But neither is the fact that they're also way more dangerous than a car. The cold reality is that motorcyclists are 30 times more likely to die in a crash than people in a car, according to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS). And nearly half of all motorcycle deaths are the result of single-vehicle crashes.

The numbers are even scarier for older riders, who are increasingly taking up or returning to motorcycling after many years. Because of slower reflexes, weaker eyesight, more brittle bones, and other disadvantages, riders over 60 years old are three times more likely to be hospitalized after a crash than younger ones.



Still, many enthusiasts enjoy a lifetime of riding without injury. The key to optimizing your odds is to be prepared and avoid risks. Keep in mind that 48 percent of fatalities last year involved speeding, according to the IIHS, and alcohol was a factor in 42 percent. Eliminate those factors and you've dramatically reduced your risk.

Below are some more tips to help you stay safe on two wheels.

**Don't buy more bike than you can handle.** If you've been off of motorcycles for awhile, you may be surprised by the performance of today's bikes. Even models with small-displacement engines are notably faster and more powerful than they were 10 or 20 years ago.

When shopping for a bike, start with one that fits you. When seated, you should easily be able to rest both feet flat on the ground without having to be on tiptoes. Handlebars and controls should be within easy reach. Choose a model that's easy for you to get on and off the center stand; if it feels too heavy, it probably is. A smaller model with a 250- to 300-cc engine can make a great starter or commuter bike. If you plan on doing a lot of highway riding, you might want one with an engine in the 500- to 750-cc range so you can easily keep up with traffic.

**Invest in antilock brakes.** Now available on a wide array of models, antilock brakes are a proven lifesaver. IIHS data shows that motorcycles equipped with ABS brakes were 37 percent less likely to be involved in a fatal crash than bikes without it. “No matter what kind of rider you are, ABS can brake better than you,” says Bruce Biondo of the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles Motorcycle Safety Program.

The reason is simple: Locking up the brakes in a panic stop robs the rider of any steering control. That can easily lead to a skid and crash, which can result in serious injury. ABS helps you retain steering control during an emergency stop, and it can be especially valuable in slippery conditions.

This critical feature is now standard on many high-end models and adds only a few hundred dollars to the price of more basic bikes. You may be able to offset some of the cost with an insurance discount. Either way, we think it’s a worthwhile investment in your safety.

**Hone your skills.** As Honda’s Jon Seidel puts it, “There is nothing we could say or advise more than to go find a Motorcycle Safety Foundation (MSF) riding course in your area. That’s critical, absolutely critical.” An MSF course or similar class can teach you the basics, as well as advanced techniques, such as how to perform evasive emergency maneuvers. The cost ranges from free to about \$350. An approved safety course may make you eligible for an insurance discount and, in some states, to skip the road-test and/or the written test part of the licensing process. Some motorcycle manufacturers offer a credit toward the cost of a new motorcycle or training if a rider signs up for an MSF course. The MSF website lists about 2,700 locations for such courses around the United States.

**Use your head.** Yes, helmets are an emotional topic for some riders. But the facts show the risk. Riders without a helmet are 40 percent more likely to suffer a fatal head injury in a crash and are three times more likely to suffer brain injuries, than those with helmets, according to government studies.

When Texas and Arkansas repealed their helmet laws, they saw a 31- and 21-percent increase in motorcycle fatalities, respectively. “It is absolute insanity to repeal helmet laws,” says Orly Avitzur, M.D., a neurologist and a Consumer Reports medical adviser. “Because helmets do save lives, it is insanity to expose the skull and the brain to potential trauma that could be prevented or at least mitigated.”



A full-face helmet that's approved by the Department of Transportation is the best choice. (Look for a DOT certification sticker on the helmet.) Modern helmets are strong, light weight, and comfortable, and they cut down on wind noise and fatigue. Keep in mind that helmets deteriorate over time, and may not be safe even if they look fine. The Snell Memorial Foundation, an independent helmet testing and standards-setting organization, recommends replacing a helmet every five years, or sooner if it's been damaged or has been in a crash. Beyond potential deterioration due to aging and exposure to hair oils and chemicals, Snell points out that there is often a notable improvement over that time in helmet design and materials.

**Wear the right gear.** Jeans, a T-shirt, and sandals are recipes for a painful disaster on a bike. Instead, you want gear that will protect you from wind chill, flying bugs and debris, and, yes, lots of road rash if you should slide out. For maximum protection, go for a leather or other reinforced jacket, gloves, full pants, and over-the-ankle footwear, even in summer. Specially designed jackets with rugged padding and breathable mesh material provide protection as well as ventilation for riding in warm weather. You'll also want effective eye protection; don't rely on eyeglasses or a bike's windscreen. Use a helmet visor or goggles. And keep in mind that car drivers who have hit a motorcycle rider often say they just didn't see them, so choose gear in bright colors.

**Be defensive.** A recent study by the University of South Florida's Center for Urban Transportation Research found that in collisions involving a motorcycle and a car, car drivers were at fault 60 percent of the time. So, you need to be extra alert, especially in this age of epidemic phone use and texting behind the wheel. Keep an eye out for cars suddenly changing lanes or pulling out from side streets. And don't tailgate; keeping a safe following distance is critical, both to ensure you have enough stopping distance and so you have time to react to obstacles in the road. An object that a car might easily straddle could be a serious hazard when on a bike.

**Avoid bad weather.** Slippery conditions reduce your margin for error. Rain not only cuts your visibility but reduces your tires' grip on the road, which can make cornering tricky. If you need to ride in the rain, remember that the most dangerous time is right after precipitation begins, as the water can cause oil residue to rise to the top. And avoid making sudden maneuvers. Be especially gentle with the brakes, throttle, and steering to avoid sliding. When riding in strong side winds, be proactive in anticipating the potential push from the side by moving to the side of the lane the wind is coming from. This will give you some leeway in the lane, should a gust nudge you.

**Watch for road hazards.** A motorcycle has less contact with the pavement than a car. Sand, wet leaves, or pebbles can cause a bike to slide unexpectedly, easily resulting in a spill. Bumps and potholes that you might barely notice in a car can pose serious danger when on a bike. If you can't avoid them, slow down as much as possible before encountering them, with minimal steering input. Railroad tracks and other hazards should be approached as close to a right angle as possible, to reduce the chances of a skid.

**Be ready to roll.** Before each ride, do a quick walk-around to make sure your lights, horn, and directional signals are working properly. Check the chain, belt, or shaft and the brakes. And inspect the tires for wear and make sure they're set at the proper pressure. Motorcycle mechanics we've spoken with say they routinely see worn-out brakes and improperly inflated tires that greatly increase safety risks. When tires are under-inflated, "handling gets really hard, steering gets hard, and the bike doesn't want to lean," says Mike Franklin, owner of Mike's Garage in Los Angeles.

*Source: Consumer Reports*



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