

FIRST THERE WAS DRIVING WHILE INTOXICATED.  
NOW THERE'S DRIVING WHILE TEXTING.

People used to brag about their multi-tasking skills, and employers were always looking for people who could multi-task. Although no one can be in two places at once, we were looking for people who could do two things at once.

But, things have gone too far.

We've known for a while that doing two things at once when you're behind the wheel is dangerous. It used to be just the woman in the right lane applying mascara and the guy to your left eating breakfast that got us outraged. That's nothing anymore. Now, it's not uncommon to see a large percentage of drivers at highway speeds driving with one hand – while the other hand is holding a cell phone up to the driver's ear.

I've had no-hands cell phone use for quite a while and I used to think that took care of the problem. However, I've changed my mind. It's the distractions that are the problem, not just the one-handed driving, so requiring two hands on the wheel even while talking on the phone won't take care of it.

However, this text messaging while driving is really scary. You've probably read or heard about the evidence that surfaced after the horrible [train crash](#) in September near Los Angeles. It appears that one of the engineers (who died in the crash) received 28 text messages and sent 29 more in the three hours before the crash. He sent his last message [22 seconds](#) before impact, just after passing a [signal](#) that would have alerted him to the disaster ahead.

The problem isn't just text messaging at the time of a wreck. It's that text messaging takes you away from your main task – driving. Many of us are so experienced at driving that most of it can be done without consciously thinking about what we are doing: move our foot to the brake; turn the wheel a certain way so the car will execute a sharp right turn; look in all our mirrors. Do you even remember what it was like to try to figure out how to let the wheel slide in your hands when you were turning so you didn't have to “walk” your hands around the wheel? Of course not. It's become natural for you to know to do that.

But what is not natural is trying to get all the signals you need to be able to make adjustments to your driving if you are involved in the world of text messaging.

The problem is only getting worse. Studies show that DWT is no longer just a problem with youthful, inexperienced drivers. [More and more older people are texting](#), some of them parents who have begun to use it as a primary way of communicating with teenagers and other young adult children. More troubling is that DWT has been found to [slow drivers' reactions](#) in ways that are very [similar to or worse than](#) people who drive while under the influence of alcohol and other drugs.

I do send or receive text messages while I'm driving. Heck, I'm not ever text messaging, because I don't know how. But that doesn't keep me safe from others on the road who are DWT.

As of January 2009, only seven states will have legislation in place that prohibits DWT. (Go to <http://www.ihs.org/laws/cellphonelaws.aspx> for details of texting bans in all states.) Maybe other legislatures should consider putting heavy fines on those caught DWT, similar to those caught driving while under the influence of alcohol and other drugs.