Raising Awareness of Texting While Driving

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Texting While Driving

 Texting while driving is a growing trend, and a national epidemic, quickly becoming one of the country's top killers. “In 2008, approximately 1 in 6 fatal vehicle collisions resulted from a driver being distracted while driving” (Wilson & Stimpson p. 5). The growth of texting while driving is what needs to be addressed. There is no such thing as safe texting and driving. Distracted driving endangers life and property and the current levels of injury and loss are unacceptable. How can awareness be raised to prevent injuries or death caused by texting and driving? People who fall victim to the texting while driving epidemic need to understand the statistics and what can be done to prevent fatalities.

**History of Cell Phones and Texting**

**Cell Phones**

The modern cell phone originated from the idea of a wireless telephone in 1908. Since then, the idea has rolled on to hand-held radio transceivers in the military, personal transceivers, and to the hand-held mobile phone. Motorola was the first company to produce a hand-held mobile phone in 1973. The prototype offered a talk time of a comical 30 minutes and took 10 hours to re-charge. The iphone, Samsung galaxy s series, and Blackberry are some of the most popular cell phones in the modern age (wikipedia.org).

**Texting**

Text messaging, or texting, is the act of composing and sending a brief, electronic message between two or more mobile phones. Texting has grown rapidly over the past decade for commercialism, emergency services, and business reasons. Text messaging has led to numerous problems as well. Texting while driving, texting while walking, sexting, and bullying are some of the problems that have arose since the boom of texting in 2002. In 2011, 7.4 trillion SMS messages were sent (wikipedia.org).

**Growth of Texting While Driving**

 Texting while driving increased from 10.9% to 15.8% from 1999 to 2008, mainly after 2005. “In 1999, about 1 in 3 persons on average had a cell phone subscription compared with 91% of all persons by 2008” (Wilson & Stimpson p. 15). Of course, as more people have cell phone subscriptions, the more prevalent texting while driving will be. Drivers know the texting dangers are a serious threat for a car accident. “Nearly nine out of 10 (88 percent) motorists believe distracted driving is a bigger problem now than it was three years ago” (Eddy p. 9). The growth of texting while driving is astounding, but the number of fatalities and is even more shocking.

**Fatalities from Distracted Driving**

Texting while driving poses the same danger as other distractions. “The accident risk when taking your eyes off the road to type in text or read the screen exceeds the risks of driving while drunk” (Goldsborough p. 2). The fatality numbers from people who are “intexticated” are unreasonable. “In 2008, almost 6,000 people were killed and half a million were injured in crashes related to driver distraction” (Waugh p. 5). Psychologists say that texting while driving is like driving blindfolded; it takes drivers’ eyes off the road for about 4.6 seconds. Numbers show that drivers aged 16-29 years old and white, non-Hispanic males are the main people who are texting while driving (Wilson & Stimpson). These drivers have less experience behind the wheel and adding distractions makes the roads more dangerous.

**Minimizing Texting While Driving**

 There have been several ways created to lessen the amount of drivers texting behind the wheel. Cell phone apps, websites and state laws are a couple of methods used.

**Cell Phone Applications**

Some apps include “Textecution”, “tXtBlocker”, “AT&T DriveMode”, and “DriveSafe.ly”. “Textecution” ($29.99 one-time charge) cuts off texting ability if the device is moving faster than 10 MPH and requires an administrator such as a parent to monitor use. “TXtBlocker” **($6.99 monthly for a single user)** allows users to customize the locations and times of day—such as routine commuting or driving times—when texts and phone calls aren’t accepted. “AT&T DriveMode” (free), available for android and blackberry, automatically sends a customized reply to incoming texts. It also disables all ingoing and outgoing calls and Web browsing. “DriveSafe.ly” (**$3.99/month or $13.95/year for a single user)** reads text messages and emails out loud in real time and even allows the user to choose a male or female voice based upon the sender of the text (nationwide.com). All of these apps can save a life and are easy to use.

**Websites**

Websites are also used in trying to prevent the use of cell phones behind the wheel. Www.distraction.gov is the official US government website for distracted driving. This website includes a multitude of facts, a pledge to stop texting while driving, and several infographics to appeal to the younger crowd. Www.itcanwait.com is another website that includes facts and a pledge. The pledge states that “…no text is worth the risk. It can wait” (itcanwait.com). It encourages users to sign up to their website to receive resources that could help save a life.

**State Laws**

The majority of states have banned texting behind the wheel. Washington was the first state to ban texting in 2007. Since then, 42 states, D.C., Puerto Rico, Guam and the U.S. Virgin Islands have also banned text messaging for all drivers. No state ban all cell phone use for all drivers, but 37 states and D.C. ban all cell phone use by **novice drivers**, and 20 states and D.C. prohibit it for **school bus drivers** (Governors State Highway Association).

**Results**

 Texting and driving has killed thousands of people. Texting is addicting; text messages “provide little hits of adrenaline. It's those adrenaline hits that can be so addicting” (Goldsborough p. 11). However, there are many ways to stop fatalities from happening due to texting behind the wheel. Text before driving, place the device out of reach, turn off the device or plan to take communication breaks (Goldsborough p. 4). Parents can even take steps to prevent their teens from texting and driving. They can put the phone down themselves, talk about the danger of dividing attention between the road and a cell phone, establish ground rules, have teens sign a pledge, educate themselves and spread the word by communicating with friends and family (Consumer Reports). Simple steps can save thousands of lives.

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