

MOUNTAIN-PLAINS CONSORTIUM

RESEARCH BRIEF | MPC 17-323 (project 407) | April 2017

Why Drivers Use Cell Phones and Support Legislation to Restrict This Practice



the **ISSUE**

The use of cell phones while driving is ubiquitous. However, surveys indicate that most drivers favor legislation to limit the use of mobile devices during the operation of a vehicle. A study was conducted to understand this inconsistency between what drivers do and what they advocate for others.

the **RESEARCH**

A survey was administered to assess the motivations underlying cell phone use while driving, and the attitudes and beliefs contributing to support for legislation to restrict this practice. Participants were asked to report the risks and benefits of their cell phone use as well as the risks and benefits of others' cell phone use while driving. They also assessed their abilities and other drivers' abilities to drive safely while distracted. Finally, they completed the Operation Span task, which has been used previously to measure multitasking ability. Participants were also asked to indicate their support for legislation restricting cell phone use while driving.



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Project Title

Why Drivers Use Cell Phones
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This Practice

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the FINDINGS

Following previous research, drivers reported using cell phones for benefits such as getting work done. The hypocrisy of using cell phones while advocating restrictions appears to stem from differences in the perceived safety risks of self vs. others' use of cell phones. Many, if not most, drivers believe they can drive safely while using mobile devices. However, they lack confidence in others' ability to drive safely while distracted and believe that others' use of cell phones is dangerous. The threat to public safety of others' usage of mobile devices was one of the strongest independent predictors of support for legislation to restrict cell phone use.

the IMPACT

The research helps us to understand why people use cell phones during the operation of a motor vehicle while supporting legislation to restrict the usage of these devices. The general support for legislation suggests that most people are willing to give up their own usage of cell phones if the threat to public safety presented by others' usage of cell phones is diminished.

For more information on this project, download the entire report at <http://www.ugpti.org/resources/reports/details.php?id=871>

For more information or additional copies, visit the Web site at www.mountain-plains.org, call (701) 231-7938 or write to Mountain-Plains Consortium, Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute, North Dakota State University, Dept. 2880, PO Box 6050, Fargo, ND 58108-6050.



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