

# FAQ

## Deaths and Injuries from Cell Phone Related Crashes Are Increasing

↓ The California Highway Patrol reported that 4,699 crashes and 31 deaths were caused by drivers on cell phones from April through December 2001. They estimate that the number of CA crashes for the entire year is well over 6,000

↓ The Harvard University Center for Risk Analysis estimates 2600 deaths, 570,000 injuries, and 1.5 million crashes ending in property damage per year. That is an increase of 1000 deaths from their estimate of two years ago.

↓ Companies are now being held liable for crashes their employees cause while on the phone

### References:

Phones Blamed in More Crashes. *LA Times*. December 2, 2002 issue  
Cell Phones and Driving: Weighing the Risks and Benefits. Joshua Cohen, PhD, Harvard Center for Risk Analysis  
Cellphone Suits Targeting Firms, *USA Today*, December 26, 2002 issue

**Question:** There are many other driver distractions. Why focus on cell phones?

**Answer:** Phone conversations have been shown to cause a **cognitive disruption** in drivers. In other words, the driver's brain is intensely engaged with the conversation, although he may appear to be paying attention to the road. This does not happen with other common distractions, including conversations with passengers. Research has shown that phone conversations cause what is termed "tunnel vision" in drivers. Although they appear to be looking at objects, their brains are not registering what they see. Therefore, a *driver is impaired for the entire length of the phone conversation.*

**Question:** I've heard that there aren't enough data to determine if talking on the phone is a danger.

**Answer:** The truth is that there is an abundance of data. There is scientific data as well as recently released crash data. All of the researchers agree that the risk of crashing is multiplied when a driver is on the phone. Not all agree to what extent this risk is increased, nor do they agree on what measures, if any, should be taken by lawmakers.

**Question:** Why doesn't hands free equipment solve the problem? At least both hands would be on the wheel.

**Answer:** The use of hands free equipment would free up both of the driver's hands. However, since it's been shown that the distraction is a mostly a **cognitive one**, having both hands on the wheel will make little difference

**Question:** I drive fine while on the phone. It's other people who can't seem to handle it. Why should I be effected?

**Answer:** Research shows that drivers are rarely aware of their own poor performance while on the phone, but have observed others driving erratically while on a cell phone. This would imply that a consequence of *using a phone while driving is that it makes a driver insensitive to his or her own impairment.*