



U.S. ARMY COMBAT READINESS/SAFETY CENTER

4905 5th Ave. Fort Rucker, AL 36362-5363
Comm. (334) 255-3770 Fax (334) 255-2266
<https://safety.army.mil>

Dangerous distractions

BOB VAN ELSBERG
Strategic Communication Directorate
U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center
Fort Rucker, Ala.

What's the first image that comes to mind when someone mentions distracted driving? Is it someone texting or talking on a cellphone? If so, here are a few Army accident reports that might surprise you:

- A Soldier became distracted while attempting to swat a bee, drifted across the centerline, sideswiped an oncoming vehicle and went into a ditch.
- A Soldier dropped his thermos and was trying to retrieve it from beneath his feet when he turned his steering wheel to the right and drove off the road into a ditch.
- A Soldier lost control of his vehicle while attempting to retrieve an object from the floor and struck a median and a utility pole.

"When a Soldier gets behind the wheel, driving must automatically become job one," said Lt. Col. Scott Wile, driving director at the U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center. "People who try to do anything other than safely guide their vehicle don't have their priorities straight on the road. Phone calls, text messages and anything else that interferes with driving aren't worth dying for — they can wait."

Not only does the National Safety Council report distracted driving plays a role in more than one in four accidents, there's medical proof it's dangerous. Using MRI tests, researchers at Carnegie Mellon University found distraction significantly impairs the part of the brain that recognizes movement. That's not a good thing when you're surrounded by moving objects that can kill you. Vision is affected too. In tests, hands-free cellphone-distracted drivers missed up to half the visual information in their driving environment, including exits, red lights, navigational signs and stop signs.

So what can you do? Before doing anything other than driving behind the wheel, ask yourself, "Is this really necessary?" Take a few moments to consider the possible bad consequences. Most likely you'll find the risks outweigh the benefits.

For cellphone users, the NSC recommends you put your cellphone on silent or vibrate before starting your car. Also, modify your voicemail to indicate you are unable to answer calls or return messages while you're driving. If you need to talk or text, pull over to a safe location and park. Finally, understand that hands-free doesn't mean risk-free — you're still mentally distracted and at greater danger than a driver who is fully focused on the road.

For more information on driving safety, visit <https://safety.army.mil>.