

Distracted driving is a serious and can be a deadly hazard for scouts and scouting youth on public roads. Distracted driving is any non-driving activity a person engages in that has the potential to distract him or her from the primary task of driving and increase the risk of crashing. There are three main types of distraction:

Visual — taking your eyes off the road

Manual — taking your hands off the wheel

Cognitive — taking your mind off what you're doing

While all and any distractions can endanger driver and passenger safety, texting is the most alarming because it involves all three types of distraction.

It is critical that everyone take responsibility and pay close attention to the safe operation of the vehicle and the road ahead. The most common distractions are texting/talking on cell phones and listening to earbuds and/or Bluetooth devices. Having earbuds or even hands-free devices in your ear while driving can be hazardous, because you will still be distracted and won't hear the important background noise around you. Other ways to be distracted are driving while eating, grooming, or in deep thought. Stay alert by getting six to eight hours of sleep per night.

There are several things that you can do to ensure your eyes, minds, and hands are engaged when driving.

Limit distractions:

If you take any personal electronic devices (PED) such as iPods, Mp3 players, headphones, Bluetooth devices or cell phones, keep them on silent and in a storage compartment. Follow and comply with traffic laws when using portable electronic devices. Scouts Canada does not condone or encourage our volunteers, youth (who have a valid drivers license) and staff to break traffic laws regarding distracted driving.

Before entering the vehicle, ensure there is no luggage or debris on the floorboards or in other areas where they are not intended so you aren't distracted by something falling or sliding while you drive.

Drive defensively:

As important as it is to make sure you eliminate all distractions while you are driving, it is also important to be aware of other drivers who may be distracted, whether you're driving or are a pedestrian. Being aware of those around you can help you drive defensively and protect yourself. Follow company and local airport safe driving policies. Report unsafe driving in the workplace to your supervisor. Keeping both hands on the wheel and maintaining good posture can help you to be more alert as you drive.

Make a commitment:

Making a commitment to yourself, Scouts Canada, our scouting youth and your family not to drive distracted can help keep you accountable for your actions. For example, create and sign a pledge among your peers to help hold each other accountable. You can even sign a pledge with your family, especially with new teenage drivers. Signing your name and making a commitment not to text, talk, or engage in other distracting activities while driving may have you think twice before you do it again.

We must remember that, as scouters, we are teachers and mentors to our scouting youth. It is our duty and our responsibility to teach our youth that distracted driving is not tolerated and is an offence in direct contravention of the Highway Traffic Act. Let's set the example and protect ourselves, our youth and the public.

Until next time, enjoy your scouting adventures and stay safe!

Don Werbowetsky
DCC Safety
Northern Lights Council