TRAFFIC INJURY RESEARCH FOUNDATION

Distracted Driving in North America

Robyn Robertson, M.C.A.
President and CEO, TIRF

International Conference on Communication Technologies & Road Safety
Abu Dhabi, UAE, November 26-27, 2014

About TIRF

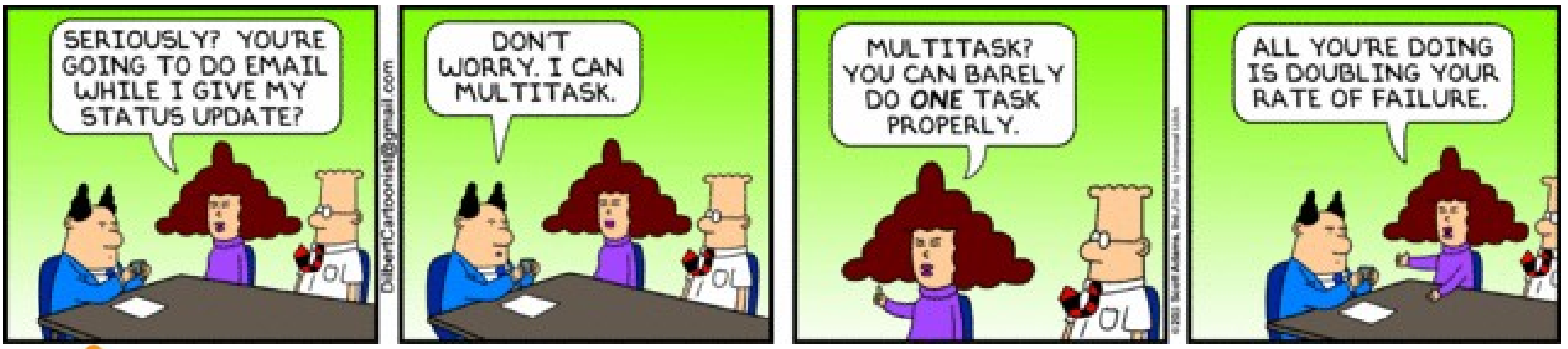
- National, independent road safety research institute
- Registered charity
- Funding
- Staff
- Focus on road users
- Scope of activities

Overview

- **Background**
- **Distracted driving in Canada**
  - Magnitude, characteristics and solutions
- **Distracted driving in the United States**
  - Magnitude, characteristics and solutions
- **Distracted driving today**
- **Conclusions**

Background

- **Why are drivers distracted in North America?**
  - Pace of daily life has increased.
  - Pressure to produce more and faster.
  - Perception that time in vehicle is 'wasted'.
  - Desire for connectivity.



Concern about texting and distracted driving in Canada:2010

Source: Vanlaar et al. 2010

Distracted driving in Canada

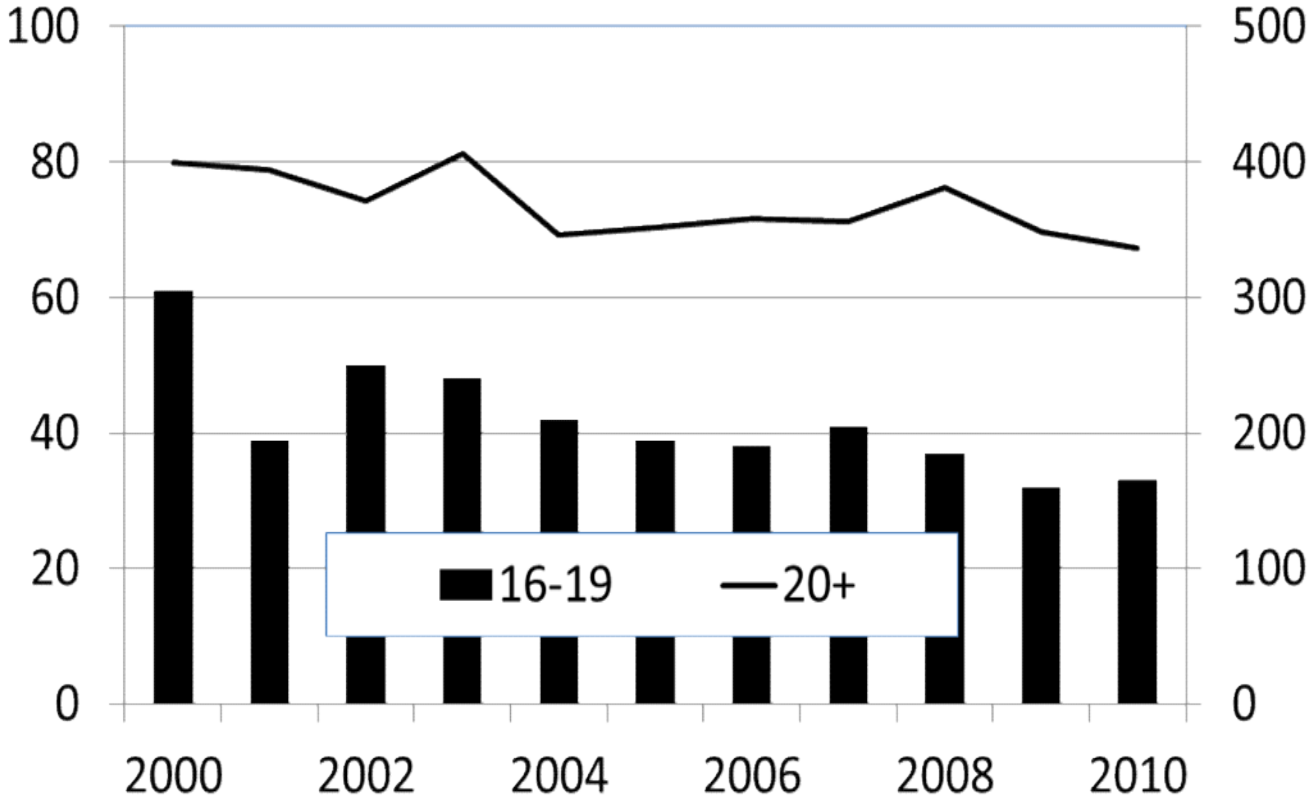
- **Generally estimated that distraction is a factor in 20-30% of crashes.**
- **TIRF Fatality Database (2008) reveals:**
  - 13-16% of fatality crashes
  - 23-27% of injury crashes
- **Measurement is challenging.**

Distracted driving in Canada

- 4.3% of drivers admitted to being in crash from external distraction; 2.7% from an internal distraction (2010).
- 23% admitted to having to brake or steer to avoid crash in last 30 days due to external distractions and 6% due to internal distractions (2011).
- 30% think talking on a phone is only dangerous if it is hand-held (2010).

Distracted driving in Canada

Figure 1
Number of distraction-related fatalities among collision victims aged 16-19 and 20 and older: Canada, 2000-2010



Distracted driving in Canada

- **A variety of solutions have been pursued.**
  - Legislation has been implemented in all Canadian jurisdictions; scope of laws and penalties vary.
  - Enforcement is strong but inconsistent.
  - Education campaigns are varied.
  - Non-profits have tackled issue.

DROP IT AND DRIVE!
DROPITANDDRIVE.COM

Distracted driving in Canada

- **National surveys (by CCMTA) before and after implementation of hand-held bans.**
  - In 2006-2007, an estimated 5.5% of drivers were talking on cell phones.
  - In 2009-2012 percentage declined to 3.3%
  - In 2012-2013 it further decreased to 2.3%.
- **Nationally, talking on hand-held devices decreased 58% overall.**
- **9 jurisdictions reported reductions in urban areas; 4 showed reductions in rural areas.**

Distracted driving in US

- NHTSA's FARS data showed that in 2009, 16% of fatality crashes and 20% of injury crashes involved distraction.
- Drivers under age 20 accounted for the greatest proportion of distraction-related fatal crashes.
- Of all drivers in fatal crashes involving distraction, 30-39 year olds had the highest proportion of cell phone involvement.
- 100-Car Naturalistic Study showed distraction is a factor in 33% of crashes and 27% of near-crashes (Klauer et al. 2006).

Distracted driving in US

- National polls in 2007/2008 revealed that more than half of drivers reported using a cell phone while driving at least some time; of these, approximately 16% said they did so regularly.
- One in 7 drivers admitted texting (AAAFTS 2008).
- In 2009, 5% of drivers were observed holding a cell phone to their ear; an estimated 9% were using some type phone for any during daylight hours (NHTSA 2010).

Distracted driving in US

- A survey of 320 licensed teen drivers found 45% reported using a phone in some capacity during most recent trip (O'Brien et al.2010).
- 12% "often" talk on phone while driving although most reported keeping conversations short.
- 23% of teen drivers said they "often" read texts while driving.
- Focus groups of teens revealed they perceived phone use as less risky, said they can multi-task, enjoyed challenge (Lerner et al. 2008).

Distracted driving in US

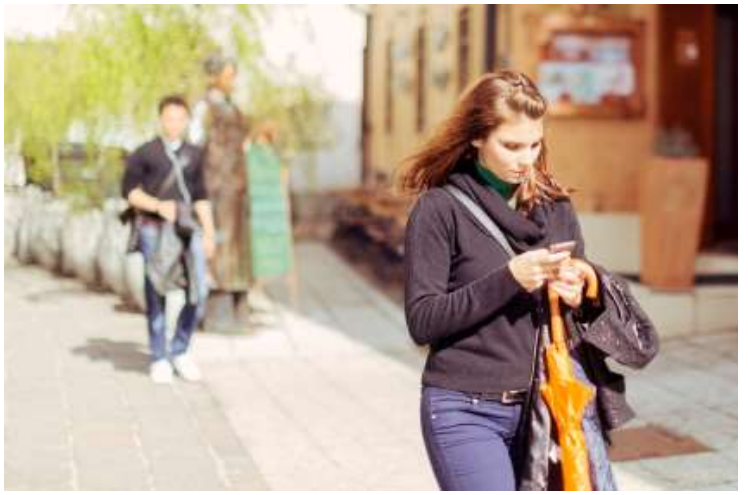
- **According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, as of 2010 there were:**
  - handheld phone bans for all drivers in 8 states and D.C.
  - handheld and hands free phone ban for school bus drivers in 18 states and D.C.
  - handheld and hands free phone ban for teen drivers in 28 states and D.C.
  - texting ban for all drivers in 30 states and D.C.
  - primary laws for texting for all drivers in 27 states
  - crash data collection in 36 states, VIs and D.C.

Distracted driving in US

- **National initiatives:**
  - Two national summits hosted by US Transportation Minister to raise awareness and bring together leaders in research, industry, and government to discuss solutions.
  - In Fall 2009, U.S. President Obama issued an Executive Order to nearly four million government employees that banned them from texting while driving in government-owned vehicles or while on official business.
  - A 2009 survey by the NSC of member companies revealed nearly 50% have a cell phone policy; unfortunately many policies are “hands free only”.

Distracted driving today

- Despite enforcement and education efforts have had some benefits, the problem remains at unacceptable levels in North America.
- Public awareness that hands-free usage is still dangerous is low.
- Public supports phone bans; believe they should apply to other drivers.
- Vulnerable road users are a growing concern.



Conclusions

- **North America is experiencing a clash between technological advances and the information age on one hand and strong desires for increased health and safety on the other.**
- **This has raised important public policy issues.**
- **Distracted driving will require a different approach than other traditional road safety issues.**
- **Need to balance competing interests.**

TRAFFIC INJURY RESEARCH FOUNDATION

DISTRACTED DRIVING: SO WHAT'S THE BIG PICTURE?

By Robyn Robertson, President and CEO, Traffic Injury Research Foundation

In the past five years distracted driving has garnered growing media attention and rapidly emerged as one of the most high-profile, talked-about issues in road safety today. In fact, Webster's Dictionary named "distracted driving" as its word of the year in 2009 (Webster's 2009). Governments, industry, safety advocates, researchers and the public have all weighed in on the issue and what needs to be done to address it. This has resulted in an unprecedented level of national and global commitment, legislation, and policy – all designed with the intention of making roads safer. Education and enforcement activities, however, have been much less pronounced.

A major reason for the fractionated efforts to address the issue is that the big picture is often neglected. Like most road safety issues, distracted driving is trans-disciplinary in nature and therefore complex both to understand and to solve. Indeed, solutions to mitigate distracted driving have not been well-evaluated so our knowledge of what works is severely limited.

The high level of complexity and diversity of available information in mainstream media does little to inform decision-makers about concrete and viable strategies to manage the issue. To put the issue into proper perspective, this article shares insight into many different facets of distracted driving that draws upon existing research, policy documents, and activities in North America.

What is distracted driving?

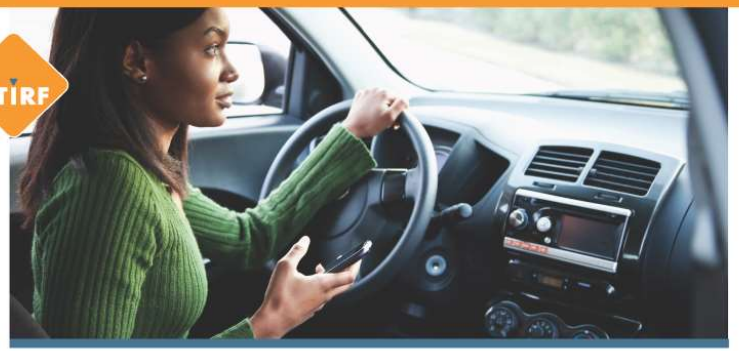
While a number of definitions exist (Tasca 2005), one of the most widely accepted in Canada is acknowledged in the proceedings from an international conference on distracted driving co-hosted by the Traffic Injury Research Foundation and the Canadian Automobile Association in 2005. It states:

"Distraction involves a diversion of attention from driving, because the driver is temporarily focused on an object, person, task, or event not related to driving, which reduces the driver's awareness, decision-making, and/or performance, leading to an increased risk of corrective actions, near-crashes or crashes" (Hedlund 2006, p.2). This definition incorporates three important aspects of the problem – the source, the effects, and the consequences.

A lot of the early focus on distracted driving was generated by concerns over cell phone use. For much of the driving public, distracted driving is synonymous with cell phone usage, but the reality is this is just one small part of the problem. Distracted driving encompasses a wide range of activities, many of which have become typical in our daily driving environment.

Cars themselves are continuously being equipped with new and potentially distracting "convenience technologies" (entertainment systems, navigation systems, multifunction controllers, talking cars). These are on top of the ubiquitous distractions – minding kids, talking to passengers, eating, grooming, reading billboards, and rubbernecking at stopped vehicles.

TRAFFIC INJURY RESEARCH FOUNDATION



TEENS AND DISTRACTED DRIVING

Traffic Injury Research Foundation, October 2013

Introduction

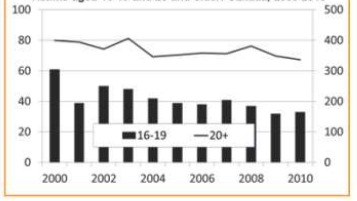
In recent years, there has been increased concern among governments, researchers and the general public about the problem of distracted driving. While several definitions of distracted driving exist, more generally this problem involves "a diversion of attention from driving, because the driver is temporarily focused on an object, person, task, or event not related to driving, which reduces the driver's awareness, decision-making, and/or performance, leading to an increased risk of corrective actions, near-crashes or crashes" (Hedlund et al. 2006, p.2). One form of distraction behind the wheel involves texting while driving. This practice has been identified as being particularly problematic for teen drivers in light of research showing that they are more receptive to using new communication technologies (Lee et al. 2011).
This fact sheet, sponsored by State Farm®, examines the role of distracted driving in fatalities among 16-19 year olds in Canada. It includes fatalities involving:

- fatally injured drivers who were distracted;
- fatally injured pedestrians who were distracted; or,
- fatally injured victims dying due to a distracted driver (fatally injured passengers and pedestrians dying in a collision where at least one driver was distracted or fatally injured non-distracted drivers who collided with a distracted driver).

Trends in the Role of Distracted Driving Among All Fatally Injured Victims Aged 16-19

This section examines trends in the role of distraction in motor vehicle collisions in which 16-19 year olds were fatally injured in Canada.
Figure 1 shows the number of fatalities among 16-19 year olds attributable to distracted driving in Canada from 2000-2010 compared to the number of distraction-related fatalities among those aged 20 and older.

Figure 1
Number of distraction-related fatalities among collision victims aged 16-19 and 20 and older: Canada, 2000-2010



The number of victims aged 16-19 is plotted with black bars and measured on the axis on the left. The number of victims aged 20 and older is plotted with a line and measured on the axis on the right. Among fatally injured 16-19 year olds, there were 61 distraction-

Stay informed!
Connect with us!

http://www.tirf.ca

tirf@tirf.ca

https://www.facebook.com/tirfcanada

@tirfcanada

http://www.linkedin.com/company/traffic-injury-research-foundation-tirf