



Madison County Sheriff's Office

Allen Riley, Sheriff

Dedicated to improving the quality
of life for the citizens of Madison
County.

**138 North Court St.
P.O. Box 16
Wampsville, NY 13163
Phone: 315.366.2318**

www.madisoncounty.ny.gov/sheriff



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DISTRACTED DRIVING

The National Highway
Traffic Safety Administra-
tion estimates that drivers
are distracted by second-
ary activities 30% of the
time while driving.

Whether eating, smoking,
drinking, talking, or
fiddling with any of the
dozens of electronic
gadgets in the car, this
behavior can be
dangerous.

**from the
Madison County
Sheriff's Office**

Sounds outside your car can also be a distraction—especially blaring horns. Rely on all your senses to help you when one of them, like hearing or sight, is drawn away by an outside distraction.

It is natural to follow the sound with your gaze, but remember to quickly bring your eyes back to the road. If the sound is unfamiliar and coming from your own car, then you will want to pull over and investigate.

Willingness to Be Distracted

Whether the distraction is inside your vehicle or outside, your willingness to be distracted will influence how successful you are in freeing yourself of driving distractions. Your personality and driving experience are both factors in how easily you lose focus.

It is easier for you to control the inside of your vehicle. For example, you can make a decision to establish a pre-trip routine to set your radio buttons, mirrors, and seat before you drive. You can also decide not to eat in the car, answer the cell phone, or play movies.

Reduce your chances of having an accident by working on driver distractions. You can control distractions inside your vehicle more readily than those outside.

According to a study released by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) and the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute (VTTI), 80% of crashes and 65% of near-crashes involve some form of driver distraction that reduces driving safety.

Committing to driving distraction free is not easy. But with the statistics telling us day after day that we are more likely to have an accident when we are distracted, many drivers are making an effort.

Reconciling your two needs—the need to drive and the need to interact with your immediate environment—is at the root of driver distraction.

Driver distraction is actually a complicated issue. Consider a few of these ideas and see if any work for you.

Distractions Inside Your Vehicle

The NHTSA groups the distractions as inside or outside the vehicle. Both kinds of distractions take only a few seconds to cause an accident, but learning to deal with them can be different depending on where the distraction originates.

Cognitive Distraction:

Look, but Don't See

Maybe you didn't know it, but if you have ever caught yourself daydreaming or spacing out, then you have been in a trance. Being lost in thought is like mentally checking out—and this distracts you when driving. Worry is another cognitive distraction rooted in emotions and thoughts.

Without your full attention on the driving task, you could be staring at a potential danger but not recognize it. Police reports actually include this as a reason for some crashes: "looked but didn't see." When you catch your attention drifting away, try to refocus:

- ◇ **Pull over and stretch your legs**
- ◇ **Take a few deep breaths**
- ◇ **Talk yourself back into focus**

Fatigue is a cognitive distraction that is extremely dangerous. Many accidents are caused by driver fatigue, and police officers even report pulling over drivers for DUI and finding out they are just sleepy. If you are drowsy then you need to get off the road. Take a nap, put a relief driver behind the wheel, or park it for the night because your fatigue won't go away until you get some good rest.

Visual Distraction:

Looking Away

Changing the radio station, putting in a CD, adjusting mirrors, looking at kids in the back seat and digging through the glove box are all visual distractions. Keep your eyes on the road so you stay in your lane and improve reaction time.

Incidentally, cell phone use is not only a visual distraction but also a cognitive one because of the conversation you might be having.

Auditory Distraction:

Follow the Sound

Noises and sounds inside the cab of your vehicle can distract you. Now, if you are listening to a clunk in your engine, then you are not really distracted but focused on an equipment problem.

But when your cell phone rings, the kids are watching a DVD, or even the radio has your attention, then you are distracted by auditory causes inside your car. To be distraction-free from sounds, you will have to silence the sources:

- ◇ Wireless phone
- ◇ On-board DVD player
- ◇ Navigational system

If you are not willing to do without these technologies, then you might try at least turning down the volume.

Biomechanical Distractions:

Knob Turning

Biomechanical, in this instance, refers to you and the machine. Whenever you turn a knob, press a button, or pull a lever, you are distracted by the mechanics inside your car. Fortunately, you don't have to give up these things to rid yourself of the distraction.

Develop a habit of adjusting your mirrors when you get into the car. You can also fix your seat, adjust the lumbar and head rest, and bring down the steering wheel if you like. Now you won't have to do these things while you are driving.

Take advantage of the automation in your car. Take the time to learn your navigation system features. Many cars have multiple sets of programmable radio buttons—enough for each driver. Some upscale vehicles even have programmable buttons for seat position so that every driver pushes a button and the seat is realigned to their personal settings.

Distractions Outside Your Vehicle

As you drive down the road, you are constantly scanning as part of your defensive driving habit—right? Well, as you scan you might be visually distracted by the scenery outside your window. Other than refusing to avert your eyes from the asphalt in front of you (hardly a feasible option), you can keep your glances short.