



### **David Teater**

Senior Director, Transportation Strategic Initiatives  
National Safety Council

David D. Teater of Spring Lake, MI, leads the NSC's advocacy initiatives to reduce deaths and injuries associated with teen driving and distracted driving. In January 2009, the NSC became the first organization to call for a nationwide ban on all forms of cell phone use while driving. Mr. Teater's 30 year business career has included serving as CEO of several private companies including 20 years at a tier one automotive supplier that provided research and strategy consulting services to most auto manufacturers. Teater served as a board member and investor, and helped launch a technology company developing solutions to distracted driving. In April 2009 Teater joined the NSC after its call for a nationwide ban on cell phone driving. He is a frequent speaker on the topic of Distracted Driving, has testified before the US Congress, been featured in the NY Times, Washington Post and most network news broadcasts, and appeared before several legislatures advocating for restrictions on cell phone use while driving. Mr. Teater participated in the 2009 US Department of Transportation's Distracted Driving Summit and presented at the Ohio Distracted Driving Summit. His presentation covers the following topics:

- The history and rapid adoption of mobile communications technology and its impact on traffic safety.
- The science of driver distraction and how mobile device use while driving degrades driver performance.
- Common misperceptions about cell phone driving.
- Corporate response and policies prohibiting employee cell phone use while driving.
- Current and future legislative environment
- Public opinion of cell phone driving bans.
- Potential technology solutions.



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**Testimony of David Teater  
Senior Director of Transportation Initiatives  
National Safety Council**

**before the**

**Pennsylvania House of Representatives Transportation Committee**

**April 13, 2010**

Thank you for affording me the opportunity to speak about the dangers of distracted driving and the use of cell phones while driving. I am David Teater, Senior Director of Transportation Initiatives for the National Safety Council, a Congressionally chartered nonprofit organization with 95 years of service to our nation preventing injuries and deaths at work, in homes, communities, and on the roads.

I am also the father of Joe Teater who was killed in a crash caused by a cell phone distracted driver in Grand Rapids, MI on January 20, 2004. Joe was 12 years old and the youngest of our three sons. He was a wonderful kid who was always happy, always smiling and looking forward to his teen years and becoming a young man. The magnitude of such a loss can not be explained with words. My wife Judy and I will remember and deeply miss our son Joe every day, for the rest of our lives. The worst part of the tragedy is knowing that Joe lost his life as the result of a phone call, and that his death could easily have been avoided. We are only one family, one of thousands who live with this reality and this knowledge every day. Cell phone driving has become an epidemic on our nation's roadways. We all must work together to stop it now.

About a year after Joe's death I started looking at the research on cell phone distracted driving. I was surprised at the body of work that already existed in 2005, and the near unanimous conclusion that the distraction of cell phone driving is unique and especially dangerous. I decided to leave the for-profit business world and advocate on behalf of others like us who have lost a loved one as a result of this new and rapidly escalating traffic safety threat. My journey over the last three years has included multiple speaking engagements with safety, business and parent groups all over North America. I helped launch a technology start-up company that has developed a technology solution to cell phone distracted driving. I have reviewed nearly all the research on this issue and regularly speak about the cognitive distraction of phone conversations.

In January of last year, the National Safety Council became the first national organization to call for bans on all cell phone use while driving. A few months later I was offered the opportunity to join the NSC, leading their efforts to reduce injuries and deaths resulting from distracted driving and teen driver crashes. In my capacity at the NSC, I have the



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privilege of working with legislators, survivor advocates, wireless operators, auto manufacturers, companies looking to implement cell phone driving policies, researchers, and technology companies seeking a solution that will mitigate a problem that arose out of the rapid adoption of mobile communications technology.

The NSC believes cell phones are in a special category of distractions that require special attention and supports legislation banning their use in motor vehicles. We believe cell phone use is the largest cause of motor vehicle crashes, based on combining the risk with risk exposure from the large number of people using cell phones while driving. In October 2009, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reported that distracted driving was involved in nearly 6,000 traffic deaths last year and more than a half million injuries. NHTSA estimates that 11% of all drivers at any given time are using cell phones. And in January of this year the NSC reported that 1.6 million crashes, more than one in four of all motor vehicle crashes involve cell phone use at the time of the crash.

How risky is it to talk on a cell phone while driving? Research from more than 75 peer-reviewed studies has shown that using phones while driving is dangerous. Research using epidemiological methods, performed by scientists associated with the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, has reported that the use of cell phones while driving increases the risk of a crash by a multiple of four. There was no difference in the risk for drivers using hand-held or hands-free devices.

Driver distractions fall in to three categories. Everyone understands the danger of visual (eyes off the road) and mechanical (hands off the wheel) distractions, but the third kind of distraction -- cognitive distraction associated with phone conversations -- is also of great concern to us. Cognitive distraction results from the need for our brains to be involved, at the same time, in both driving and a conversation with a remote person. It is the conversation with a person not in our driving environment that is the source of the problem. Unlike visual and mechanical distractions, with cognitive distraction the driver is not aware that they are distracted, resulting in the distraction lasting for much longer periods of time.

Research has shown that the impact of conversations with a person physically seated next to you is very different than one on a cell phone. The passenger is in the same driving environment. They see looming threats and the conversation stops. Passengers provide an additional set of eyes and are engaged in the driving task. A phone conversation is different. Brain scan imagery from research at Carnegie Mellon University shows that up to 37% of the brain that should be engaged in driving is lost while talking on a cell phone. Experimental studies at the University of Utah have further measured the specific risk of cognitive distraction, showing that drivers on cell phones fail to see up to half of the information in the driving environment that people not on cell phones recognize. It is



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this loss of brain function devoted to driving and the resulting inattention blindness that cause us so much concern.

There is broad agreement among most in the scientific and safety communities that hands-free devices do not significantly reduce the risks associated with phone conversations while driving. More than 30 research studies have compared the differences between hand-held and hands-free phones. These studies have consistently shown no safety benefit from hands-free devices. Hands-free devices do not remove the risk of cognitive distractions associated with cell phone conversations.

There are many things that can distract motorists from their primary duty to operate their vehicles safely. Studies have placed the risk of cell phone use to be greater than common in-car activities like eating, drinking, listening to or adjusting the radio, and inserting a CD. These activities distract drivers' attention briefly and divert hands and eyes, but they generally do not pose significant distractions to the drivers' brains, or they occur for very short durations.

All distractions are not the same when it comes to causing crashes. With 100 million people admitting that they engage in cell phone conversations, an activity that makes them four times more likely to be in a crash, statistical analysis suggests that cell phone conversations are the leading distraction-related cause of crashes.

Fortunately, we do not have 100 million people reading newspapers, putting on makeup, or reaching for objects in the back seat for hours every day while driving. And at least for now, we don't have that many texting or emailing while driving. So while these are higher risk activities, they occur less frequently and for shorter durations. Because fewer people are doing them for shorter periods of time, we believe they lead to far fewer crashes than do cell phone conversations.

So how do we address this issue? We know from our experience, working with the automotive industry and the insurance industry to increase seat belt use, that changing the behaviors of the American motoring public requires leadership, research, education, legislation and enforcement. It would be wonderful if we could simply educate our way out of this problem. However, the knowledge we have of how to change human behavior suggests otherwise.

Today, more than 90% of Americans acknowledge in public opinion polls that they know that talking on a phone while driving is risky. Yet 80% of them admit doing it. People are aware of the risks of cell phone use while driving, yet they are choosing to do it any way. Making more people aware of the risks will not change their behavior. Education is important to be sure, but there is no evidence that asking risk-takers to change their own risky behavior has ever had much of an effect. Years of traffic safety education programs have taught us the unfortunate axiom that education, by itself, does not change



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behavior. The most effective education to change behavior is education about enforcement. "Click it or Ticket" and "Drunk Driving: Over the Limit, Under Arrest" are not just clever slogans. They are research-based educational messages tied to the enforcement of specific laws. These kinds of educational messages, tied to enforcement of laws, do work in changing behavior.

While no legislature has yet enacted a total ban on all cell phone use while driving, many employers have done so. The National Safety Council has 20,000 member organizations that employ more than 8 million people at 55,000 work places across the nation. More than 460 of our member companies have established policies that prohibit all use of cell phones by employees while on company business, or when using company-owned cell phones or vehicles. These policies cover an estimated 1.5 million employees.

These organizations with bans include several cities, one of the nation's largest trucking companies, large companies with thousands of sales and delivery people, and small businesses. These organizations would not accept their employees operating machinery in their factories or distribution centers in a manner that makes them four times more likely to be injured, and they don't accept it when their employees are operating machinery on roads either. They also do not want to accept the liability that comes with allowing employees to do their jobs in an unsafe manner that puts themselves and others at risk. Whether you are operating a piece of machinery in a factory or on the highway, one's full attention must be focused on the task at hand and not diverted by a phone conversation.

Even the National Transportation Safety Board has looked at the evidence and enacted a total ban for its staff on cell phone use while driving, including hands-free conversations. We urge the Congress, as employers, to implement total cell phone bans while driving for yourselves and for your staffs to reduce your risk of injury and that of the people who share the roads with you.

Early reports from organizations that have implemented bans indicate that productivity, customer service and profitability are not affected by cell phone policies. Most importantly, employees are safer because they are not engaging in high-risk activities while driving.

Strong laws, visibly enforced combined with education will help address this epidemic; however, because of the unique and compelling nature of cell phone use, we believe technology is likely the best solution. The NSC has met with, and is encouraging several entrepreneurial companies that are developing technology solutions. Four of these companies have demonstrable products that hold great promise. One has successfully completed a technology trial with one of the nation's largest wireless networks. A few are only months away from initial, but limited product launch. All of these companies, like most start-ups, face significant challenges raising capital and getting the attention of



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customers and business partners. The wireless industry, the auto industry, and government agencies like the FCC, with proper engagement, can dramatically shorten the time to market for these life saving technologies.

Using cell phones while driving has become part of our culture. Changing this part of our culture will not be easy. It will take leadership, research, education, legislation and visible enforcement. But it must be done.

The 20 year old young woman, who ran the red light causing the crash that killed my son, was on the phone with her church where she volunteered for kids Joe's age. She was recently married and looking forward to leaving for basic training with her husband who had just enlisted in the U. S. Air Force. Both of our lives have been substantially impacted to say the least. She is a good person, and had she been aware of the dangers, or had there been a law banning cell phone use while driving in Michigan, Joe would be alive today. It is time for federal leadership on this issue. There is no phone call, email or text message worth a human life.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify this morning.