

## **“EVERYDAY DRIVING: MINIMIZE THE RISKS BY MANAGING THE DISTRACTIONS”**

Have you ever talked on a cell phone while driving? Changed the radio station or put in a new CD? Had something to eat or drink while you were driving? Reached into the backseat or leaned over to pick up something that had dropped on the floor? Read a map or directions? How about just talked to friends in the car with you? If you're like most people, you answered 'yes' to one or more of those questions.

Distracted driving is defined as the failure to pay attention while driving. It occurs anytime motorists take their concentration away from the road or oncoming traffic hazards. As Peter Kissinger, President of the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, points out, "Distraction has been a problem ever since we started driving. It continues to grow because there is more traffic, more congestion, and more things to distract us."

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), distracted drivers are a factor in 25 to 50 percent of all vehicle crashes. Of the more than 6 million motor vehicle crashes reported to law enforcement agencies each year in the United States, between 4,000 and 8,000 crashes related to distracted driving occur each day.

In general, a distraction is anything that takes your *eyes, hands, or mind* away from the task at hand – driving. According to studies by the University of North Carolina Highway Safety Research Center for the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety (2003), there are a great number of distracting activities that drivers engage in. Some of the most common are: \* Reaching, leaning, etc.; \* manipulating music/audio controls; \* eating, drinking, etc.; \* conversing; \* grooming; \* reading or writing; \* using cell phone; and \* smoking.

According to Shelia Lewis, Family and Consumer Sciences Extension Agent in Smith County, the best advice is to keep your *eyes* on the road; keep your *hands* on the wheel, and keep your *mind* on the ride. The following tips can help manage distractions:

- Review maps before hitting the road.
- Do your personal grooming at home, not in the car.
- Don't take notes or look up a phone number while driving.
- Before you get behind the wheel, familiarize yourself with the features of your vehicle's equipment.
- Preset radio and climate controls.
- Secure items that may move around when the car is in motion.
- Don't try to retrieve items that fall to the floor while driving. Wait until your vehicle is parked.
- Avoid smoking, eating, drinking, and reading while driving.
- Teach your children the importance of good behavior while riding in the car. Pull safely off the road and out of traffic to tend to them.

- Recognize that driving requires your full attention. If you find your mind wandering while you are driving, remind yourself to stay focused on the road. If necessary, stop and take a break from driving.
- Ask a passenger to serve as copilot and help you with activities that may be distracting, such as maps, directions, or unfamiliar navigation systems.
- Monitor traffic conditions before engaging in activities that could divert attention away from driving.
- Don't use a cell phone while driving. But if you must, use memory dialing or have a passenger dial for you; don't engage in emotional conversations; keep the conversation short, and don't combine distracting activities. Always assess the current traffic situation before making or receiving calls. Do not answer or dial the phone when driving in hazardous conditions.

Extension programs serve people of all ages regardless of socioeconomic level, race, color, sex, religion, disability, or national origin