

By Shannon Segall

Texting and Driving Don't Mix

So you want to be plugged in
And you think it's really cool
To text while driving?
Well, don't play the fool.
You can't drive while blind,
When your hands aren't steering,
Or when your mind's on conversation --
Soon a siren you'll be hearing.
It's NOT worth the risk
Someone's life depends on you
Keep your hands on the wheel -
The road, NOT text screen, in view!

Maybe rapping about not tapping on the cell-phone keyboard could catch people's attention about how dangerous it is to text and drive. Education and high-visibility public awareness campaigns are the best ways to make people think twice about the risks of this behavior. It is easy for us to think that we are invulnerable; that bad things won't happen to us. Of course, we don't want to hurt anyone else and it is easy to believe that taking our eyes off the road for just a few seconds won't really matter. But it does matter. Taking your eyes off the road even for a few seconds while driving cannot only be dangerous, but deadly.

Texting while driving has been called Public Enemy Number 1. The National Transportation Secretary believes it is a "deadly epidemic," and says that the incidence of this dangerous behavior is increasing. One study found that, on average, drivers take their eyes off the road for almost 5 seconds of every 6 seconds of text messaging. Five seconds is a long time to be driving blind, as even at 35 mph in the city, you can go past four power poles and cover half a block- all while not watching where you are going and hurtling forward in two tons of steel. Driver inattention is a major cause of car accidents, and Liberty Mutual Insurance Company found that texting while driving leads the list as the biggest cause of driver distraction. Even more dangerous than drunken driving, it can lead to a 10% increase in erratic lane changes and slow drivers' reaction times by 30%. Drivers have a difficult time processing their visual environment, and may not even recognize red stoplights ahead of them. The risk of having an accident is 23 times higher for the driver while texting than the undistracted driver. It's really scary that 34 percent of teens admit to text messaging while driving. Even the CTIA, the lobbying group for the wireless industry, said, "Texting while driving is incompatible with safe driving."

All drivers must take responsibility, not only for their own safety, but for everyone else on the road. Someday, technology may help by inactivating cell phone texting for the car's driver. Strong laws with strong enforcement are also important. Heightening awareness of risks by using schools and the media to publicize the dangers of texting while driving will help people change their behavior. Too many

people have already been hurt or killed. Only recently in New York, five varsity cheerleaders were killed only five days after high school graduation in a car accident due to the driver texting. These teens lost all their bright future dreams in just a moment of time. It is easy enough just to turn off the cell phone until you're done driving, reply to voice mail later, or tell friends not to text you while you are driving. Life is precious; safety matters. You can always say "Hi" to your friends by text message, but afterwards--when you are through driving. Just don't let the "Hi" become a permanent "Goodbye." When it comes right down to it, the solution isn't so hard. Just don't text and drive.