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## Cell phones gum up traffic



You can now officially blame your long commute on the jerk on his cell phone.

Motorists who talk on cell phones **drive slower on the freeway, pass sluggish vehicles less often and take longer to complete their trips**, according to a study that showed cell phones not only make driving dangerous but cause delays.

Here's what we already know about cell phones and safety based on previous studies by the research group lead by University of Utah psychology professor [Dave Strayer](#):

- **Conversation is a major distraction.** That means hands-free cell phones are no less dangerous while driving than hand-held cell phones.
- **Cell phones age us.** When young adults are talking on cell phones while driving, their reactions times become as slow as reaction times for seniors.
- **You're as dangerous as a drunk driver.** Drivers talking on cell phones are as impaired as drivers with the 0.08 percent blood alcohol level that defines drunken driving in most states. Read "[Fatal Distraction: A comparison of the cell-phone driver and the drunk driver.](#)"

The new study, which is scheduled to be presented on Jan. 16 during the Transportation Research Board's annual meeting, showed that if just two or three people gum up the system by making fewer lane changes or driving more slowly, the cascading effects slow everybody's commute.

Compared with undistracted motorists, drivers on cell phones drove an average of 2 miles per hour slower and took 15 to 19 seconds longer to complete the 9.2 miles. This might seem insignificant, but it's likely to be compounded if 10 percent of all drivers are talking on wireless phones at the same time, said researcher Joel Cooper, a doctoral student in psychology.

Highway statistics suggest drivers on cell phones are four times more likely to be in an accident, while Strayer's earlier research suggests the risk is 5.36 times greater.

Meanwhile, an insurance company survey estimated 73 percent of wireless users talk while driving. Another survey found that during any given moment during the day, 10 percent of U.S. drivers are using cellular phones.

Fifty countries have adopted laws banning hand-held phones while driving.

But the researchers say hands-free phone conversations are distracting, "thus, the majority of current regulation appears to be misguided."

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