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# Texting Drivers Willing to Play With Fire



**Texting while driving is a particularly pernicious behavior because the vast majority of those who do it are well aware of the risks but choose to do it anyway. Education alone won't put a dent in this problem, since the culprits admittedly are already educated as to the dangers. What will it take then? "Rigorous enforcement and painful consequences," suggested advice columnist April Masini.**

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By *Erika Morphy*  
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Texting while driving is dangerous. We know that intuitively; we know it because the statistics say so; we know it because we have seen any number of public service announcements warning of its hazards.

A whopping 98 percent of respondents in a recent survey of people who text at least once a day acknowledged the danger of texting while driving -- yet most admitted to doing it anyway.

The survey, conducted by David Greenfield, founder of [The Center for Internet and Technology Addiction](#), was sponsored by AT&T.

## Who's Doing It and Why

Forty-three percent of survey participants admitted to reading a text message while driving. Some 27 percent said they have sent a text message while driving. A total of 66 percent of people surveyed said they had read a text message while stopped at a red light, and 49 percent said they had sent a message when stopped.

Thirty-four percent of people surveyed admitted to glancing at their devices while driving to see if they had received a message, and another 49 percent said they had done so while stopped at the light.

"I want to stay connected to my family, friends, work," said 43 percent of the respondents.

"I'm so used to being connected to my phone; it is simply a habit to use it in the car as well," 30 percent of the respondents said.

Other oft-cited reasons:

- "I can easily do several things at once, even while driving";
- "I'm afraid I'll miss something important if I don't check my phone right away";
- "My driving performance is not impacted by my texting;" and
- "I feel others expect me to answer right away."

AT&T's influence in this survey is not hard to spot. Drivers who have downloaded apps that block them from texting are asked how effective they are (23 percent say extremely effective and 32 percent say very effective); and whether they feel good after taking steps to stop this behavior (82 percent feel positive about it).

Here it should be noted that AT&T has released an app that silences a device if it is moving more than 15 miles per hour.

Texting while driving is clearly a public safety issue, Jamie Boone, director of government affairs at the [Consumer Electronics Association](#) told TechNewsWorld.

"The Consumer Electronics Association strongly believes that a driver's first and

ultimate responsibility is the safe handling of their vehicle in all circumstances," she said. "Public policy changes are important."

CEA supports commonsense bans on texting while driving, especially among teen drivers, Boone added.

This is also an issue that affects the workforce, said Daniel Brown, risk control technical manager at [Travelers](#).

The average work-related motor vehicle injury claim costs US\$69,206, which is twice as much as other work-related injuries, he noted, citing National Safety Council statistics.

## How to Stop

Given all this information, why do people still text, despite the risks? It is difficult to envision a life-and-death scenario in which a driver absolutely must respond to a text at that moment -- and not, say, 10 minutes later when the car is safely parked.

The reasons survey participants gave for their texting behavior suggest there is some magical thinking going on (I can safely drive a 3,500 pound vehicle while multitasking!) and more than a little bit of tech addiction (I can't wait five minutes to see who sent me a text).

Modifying behavior is never easy, especially when drivers are cognizant of the dangers of what they're doing, April Masini, author of the [Ask April](#) advice column, told TechNewsWorld.

"Policy and public service may bring awareness to the problem of texting while driving, but when it comes to changing that behavior, it's going to take more than sanitized rules and regulations," she pointed out.

"It's going to take rigorous enforcement and painful consequences," said Masini, "that will make texting while driving so uncomfortable that the risk drivers take when they text is no longer worth it to them." 

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