

# Distracted Driving Inside and Outside the Warehouse

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As technology with cell phones and mobile devices evolve, so does the risk of vehicle accidents whether they are on the road or in the warehouse. It has become the norm to see people driving with one hand on the wheel while holding a cell phone in the other hand in this day and age. Distracted driving not only includes cell phone and mobile devices but anything that will take the driver's attention from looking in the direction of travel. The consequences are serious and fatal in some cases.

At the edge of their fingertips, people are checking for directions to their next destination, receiving text messages from their family and friends, or updating their social media status or responding to a call from their supervisors or customer service representatives on ETAs of when the customers will receive their orders. These not only impact the average person on a day to day basis but also truck drivers, sales staff and forklift operators in the distribution industry. Provincial laws are starting to become more stringent around distracted driving with respect to driving on the road with heftier fines, license suspensions and demerit points. But what about forklift operators? There aren't specific laws governing distracted driving while operating forklifts besides the general duties clause that refers to an employer's duty to "take every precaution reasonable in the circumstances for the protection of a worker" under the Occupational Health and Safety Act.

The most common distractions are cell phones which affect the driving ability and performance in several ways:

- \* The driver reacts more slowly when braking in an emergency;
- \* The driver has difficulty in a straight line, avoiding obstacles on the road or maintaining a safe distance from other vehicles;
- \* The driver is less aware of what is happening around him or her, both inside and outside of the vehicle;
- \* The field of vision is reduced.

A cell phone therefore negatively impacts visual, cognitive and coordination tasks. It more negatively affects tasks related to a driver's vision, and therefore his awareness of events and objects that arise in the environment, than tasks associated with the driver's actions. The greatest danger lies in the conversation itself, not simply in the act of handling the cell phone device. Accidents from distracted driving not only jeopardize human life but impacts productivity, ETAs on deliveries, and property damage.

So what can an employer do?

Employers can certainly provide hands free devices for employees that are expected to answer calls along with developing, implementing and enforcing policies and procedures.

Here at Ariva, we have implemented the following Cell Phones and Music Devices Safety Rules for drivers and warehouseman along with Hand-free Safety Rules:

- \* The use of a cell phone that does not have a "hands-free" function is prohibited while driving a vehicle; drivers must bring their vehicle to a stop in a location where parking is authorized.
- \* Drivers who are holding a cell phone in their hand are presumed to be using it.
- \* Music devices with a headphone function are prohibited while driving a vehicle or operating a machine in the warehouse.
- \* Drivers can use GPS (global positioning system) for navigation purposes while operating a vehicle as long as the GPS is properly affixed to the dashboard or windshield. The GPS cannot be used as a hand-held device and no manual programming/manipulation or adjusting of the GPS systems while driving. Settings must be programmed prior to driving.
- \* Warehousemen are prohibited from using any personal cell phones while on duty with the exceptions of breaks. Cell phones for business use are only allowed if the warehouseman stops operating any machine before answering or making a business call.

If for a reason, it is absolutely necessary that the driver uses the cell phone while driving; the precautions below must be followed:

- \* Hands-free functions must be easily accessible. If they are not placed in an accessible place, then drivers are not to try to look for the device and let the voice mail take the calls.
- \* Never take notes or read while using a cell phone.
- \* Hands-free systems should be firmly secured in a holder to avoid any need for handling while driving. Devices equipped with Bluetooth wireless technology or any other devices that can be attached to the ear are authorized, as well as voice recognition devices. Use of a headset with a "hands-free" device is permitted provided the headset has only one earphone so that the driver can continue to hear the sounds of surrounding traffic.

Enforcement of these rules is highly important. Employee training combined with safety talks, 1-on-1 conversations along with disciplinary measures are some of the methods used at Ariva.