

Loss control



Distractions and inattention

Most professional drivers agree that many accidents are the result of one or more drivers not paying full attention to their driving duties. Lack of attention results in the driver not being able to respond appropriately to changing driving conditions.

Driver inattention often falls into the following categories:

- Taking your eyes off the forward roadway
- Performing secondary tasks
- Daydreaming
- Fatigue

Taking eyes off the forward roadway

Part of the allure of truck driving is the ability to see all parts of the country and the interesting activities along the way. While this can be alluring, it can also result in an accident if the driver takes his or her eyes off the forward roadway for long periods of time. Drivers should limit sightseeing and stay focused on the road ahead—no matter how interesting things look along the roadway.



Limit mirror checks to less than two seconds at a time.

Checking mirrors and blind spots is a critical safety practice professional drivers do regularly. This practice takes a driver's eyes off the forward roadway. To remain safe, it must be done quickly so as to minimize the amount of time your eyes are away from the forward roadway.

A National Highway Transportation Safety Association study¹ found drivers should limit their mirror and blind spot scanning to less than two seconds, ideally one second or less. Taking your eyes away from the

forward roadway for more than two seconds greatly increases your crash risk. Drivers should develop a regular scanning pattern which includes viewing left and right mirrors and blind spots—always scanning ahead before moving to the next spot. Make sure not to move your eyes away from the forward roadway for more than two seconds, preferably less than one second.

There are situations when a driver must look away from the roadway in performing their general driving duties, such as looking for a building address. In these cases the driver should increase his or her following distance and limit their searches to less than two seconds.

Secondary tasks

Performing secondary tasks, such as reading a map or dialing a cell phone, divert your eyes and mind away from your driving duties, often for several seconds. A National Highway Transportation Safety Association study² on distracted driving among truck drivers found, not surprisingly, that performing secondary tasks greatly increases your crash risk.

It found that your crash risk increases by four times while reading, six times while dialing a cell phone, seven times while looking at a map, nine times while writing, 10 times while interacting with a dispatch device, 10 times while performing complex activities such as cleaning a side mirror or rummaging through a bag, and 23 times while texting. All these distractive tasks are within the drivers control to limit or eliminate altogether.

With an increased crash rate of 23 times normal, it is understandable why the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration banned texting in commercial motor vehicles. The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration has also banned hand-held cell phone use for commercial motor vehicle drivers. Both rules establish significant fines for violations and disqualify drivers after multiple offenses.



Perform secondary tasks, such as route planning, while safely parked.

Why are all these activities so hazardous? Because they distract a driver for long periods of time, often for four or more seconds. While four seconds does not seem like a long time, a truck traveling at 60 miles per hour can travel 352 feet, or more than the length of a football field.

Driving while distracted is like driving blind; a lot of hazardous situations can develop while distracted. Secondary tasks should not be performed while driving. They should be performed while safely parked.

Daydreaming

Daydreaming is also a form of driver inattention. Drivers spend so much time on the road it's not surprising that they periodically begin daydreaming.

While daydreaming, the driver's eyes may be seeing what is happening but the mind is not processing the information. How many times have you snapped-to on the roadway, not remembering the last couple of miles? If you find your mind wandering, quickly refocus on the driving situation—scanning, anticipating, and adjusting to the traffic around you.

Fatigue

Drivers understand that driving while severely fatigued can be dangerous, but moderate drowsiness can also impact a driver's ability to recognize and respond to hazards. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration³ has found that driving while moderately or severely drowsy increases your crash risk by nearly six times. Drowsy driving can occur during the day as well as at night. Drivers who become drowsy should immediately find a safe place to park and get adequate rest.



¹Distraction in commercial trucks and buses: assessing prevalence and risk in conjunction with crashes and near crashes, (Document No. FMCSA-RRR-10-049) Washington, DC: Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration.

²Driver Distraction in Commercial Vehicle Operations. FMCSA-RRR-09-042. Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration. (2009).

³The 100-Car Naturalistic Driving Study, Phase II - Results of the 100-Car Field Experiment. DOT HS 810 593. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. (2006).

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