

★ ★ ★ ★ Safety Culture

Distracted Driving the Top Reason that 35 Percent of Drivers Feel Less Safe than Five Years Ago, According to the AAA Foundation

Eighty-Seven Percent Rated Texting or E-mailing a Very Serious Threat, Ranked Almost Even with Drunk Driving

Washington, D.C. – Thirty-five percent of drivers said they feel less safe than they did five years ago, according to the second-annual *2009 Traffic Safety Culture Index* released today by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety. Overall, the majority of American motorists report that they feel no safer now than they did five years ago.

In an effort to spark the dialogue about improving our safety culture and working toward the goal of zero deaths on our nation's highways, the AAA Foundation launched its second-annual survey of the driving public on a wide variety of issues.

“Over the past twenty-five years, motor vehicle crashes have prematurely, violently and tragically ended the lives of one million Americans – killing more of our children, teens and young adults than any other single cause,” said AAA Foundation President and CEO Peter Kissinger. “That’s one death every 13 minutes.”

Distracted driving was top-of-mind for motorists, with 80 percent of motorists rating distracted driving as a very serious threat to their safety. Even those who admitted to distracted driving acknowledged they were putting themselves in danger. For example, more than half of those who admitted to reading or sending text messages or e-mails while driving indicated they were much more likely to have an accident.

“As mobile technology evolves at a breakneck pace, more and more people rightly fear that distracted driving – phone calls, e-mails and texting – is a growing threat on the highways. *The 2009 Traffic Safety Culture Index* shows that people today fear distracted drivers almost as much as drunk drivers,” said AAA Foundation President and CEO Peter Kissinger.

Following are highlights from the *2009 Traffic Safety Culture Index*:

- 90% of respondents said people driving after drinking alcohol was a very serious threat to their safety; 87% said the same about text messaging or e-mailing while driving
- 80% of motorists rated distracted driving as a very serious threat to their safety, yet many admitted performing distracted behaviors like talking on the cell phone or texting or e-mailing while driving within the last month

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Car crashes rank among the leading causes of death in the United States.

- Over two-thirds admitted to talking on a cell phone and 21% admitted to reading or sending a text message or e-mail while driving in the past month
- Nearly 90% said that texting or e-mailing while driving was a very serious threat to safety, yet 18% of those same people admitted texting in the past month
- 58% said that talking on a cell phone while driving was a very serious threat to their safety, yet 55% of those same people self-reported talking on cell phones while driving in the past month
- Nine out of 10 people considered running a red light unacceptable, yet 26% of those same people admitted to running a red light
- Nine out of 10 people considered tailgating unacceptable, yet 24% of those same people admitted to tailgating in the past 30 days
- 63% considered speeding 15 mph or more on the highway unacceptable, yet 28% of those same people admitted doing so in the past month. Fully 95% of people rated speeding 15 mph or more over the speed limit on residential streets unacceptable, yet 21% of those same people admitted doing so in the past month.

A previous AAA Foundation survey found two out of three drivers mistakenly believe using a hands-free cell phone is safer than talking on a hand-held device. In this survey, the use of a hands-free cell phone was the only behavior that more than half of all drivers rated as acceptable, yet numerous other studies have shown it is equally as dangerous as talking on a hand-held phone – both quadruple your risk of being in a crash.

“There are many motorists who would never consider drinking and driving, yet they think it’s somehow okay to text or e-mail while driving. We need to stigmatize distracted driving to the same degree as drunk driving in our culture, because both behaviors are deadly,” said Kissinger. “This survey shines the light on drivers behaving badly; it also raises some dangerous public misconceptions. We’d like to end the belief that ‘it’s the other guy’s problem’ and end the false sense of security that ‘if I chat on a hands-free cell phone I’m somehow safer.’”

The AAA Foundation continues to shed light on the lack of American traffic safety culture and is working to build a social climate in which traffic safety is highly valued and rigorously pursued. Given the preventable nature of the majority of traffic deaths, the AAA Foundation implores drivers to stay off the phone, buckle up, don’t drink and drive, and obey the speed limit. For more information, visit www.AAAFoundation.org.

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Established in 1947 by AAA, the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety is an independent, publicly funded, 501(c)(3) charitable research and educational organization. The AAA Foundation’s mission is to prevent traffic deaths and injuries by conducting research into their causes and by educating the public about strategies to prevent crashes and reduce injuries when they do occur.

The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety commissioned Abt SRBI Inc. to conduct a random sample telephone survey of 2,501 U.S. adults in English and in Spanish from April 15, 2009 through May 12, 2009. The survey has a margin of error of 2.5.