



Safety Culture

“Do As I Say, Not As I Do” Attitude Persists among American Motorists

[2012 Traffic Safety Culture Index](#) Fact Sheet

For the fifth consecutive year, the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety has continued its efforts to measure and benchmark the attitudes and behaviors of American drivers in an attempt to understand – and strengthen – a culture of safety on our roads. As in previous years, the 2012 *Traffic Safety Culture Index* found that an attitude of “do as I say, not as I do” persists among motorists, many of whom admit to engaging in the same dangerous behaviors that they criticize as being “unacceptable.” Complete highlights are below.

Methods

- Random sample of 3,896 U.S. residents of driving age (16+)
- Conducted September 7-24, 2012 using web-enabled probability-based panel representative of U.S. population
- Participants were asked questions about threats on the highway, acceptability of behaviors, support for laws and countermeasures, and frequency of engaging in risky behaviors
- Survey conducted by GfK for the AAA Foundation

2012 Key Findings

Personal Experience with Crashes:

- More than **one in five** drivers have been involved in a serious crash
- Nearly **one in three** Americans have had a friend or relative seriously injured or killed in a crash

Severity of Traffic Safety Concerns:

- More than **two thirds** of Americans (67.7%) say aggressive drivers are a somewhat or much bigger problem today compared with three years ago
- Nearly **nine in ten** (88.5%) say this about distracted driving
- Roughly **half** (51.6% and 50%, respectively) say this about drunk driving and drivers using drugs

“Do As I Say, Not As I Do”:

- **Texting/emailing:** 80.7% say it is a very serious threat to safety, and 82.9% say it is completely unacceptable; however, more than a third (34.7%) read a text or email while driving in the past 30 days, and more than a quarter (26.6%) typed one
- **Speeding (10+ mph) on residential streets:** 45.2% say it is a very serious threat, 63% say it is completely unacceptable, but nearly **half** (46.8%) have done it in the past month

(continued)



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



- **Red light running:** 55.5% say it is a very serious threat, 69.6% say it is completely unacceptable, yet more than a third (38.4%) of drivers admit to doing it in the past 30 days
- **Drowsy driving:** 45.4% say it is a very serious threat, 82.7% say it is completely unacceptable, yet nearly three in ten (29.9%) have done it in the past month

Perceptions of Cognitive Distraction:

- Although **two thirds** (66%) say hand-held cell phone use by drivers is unacceptable, more than **half** (56.2%) say hands-free devices are **acceptable**
- Nearly **three quarters** (74.3%) say they believe hands-free devices are safer to use behind the wheel than hand-held ones
- Over **half** (51.3%) of drivers who report using speech-based in-vehicle systems say they do not believe these systems are at all distracting
- Support for total bans on mobile devices (hand-held and hands-free) is lower (48.6%) than for hand-held-only bans (66.5%)
- Despite this, existing research has not indicated that hands-free devices are safer. The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety is therefore currently sponsoring a landmark study of cognitive distraction to better understand this issue

Variations by Age:

- In general, compared with older drivers, younger drivers were:
 - ✓ More likely to report engaging in distracting behaviors behind the wheel;
 - ✓ More likely to find these behaviors acceptable; and
 - ✓ Less likely to support legislation aimed at curbing distractions

Support for Laws and Countermeasures:

- Strong societal support exists for texting bans (86.4%), ignition interlock requirements for all offenders (80.5%), and universal helmet laws for motorcyclists (81.7%)
- There is majority opposition for speed cameras on freeways (64.3%) and residential streets (51.2%)
- Support is greater for hand-held cell phone bans (66.5%) than for total bans, which would prohibit hands-free devices (48.6%)

For More Information

For more information about the Foundation's work pertaining to traffic safety culture and its specific elements (e.g., drowsy, distracted, and impaired driving), as well as products and other materials, visit www.AAAFoundation.org.

The 2012 *Traffic Safety Culture Index* was released in January 2013. The complete report, along with detailed analyses of drowsy and distracted driving, is available at www.aaafoundation.org/projects.

Established in 1947 by AAA, the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety is a not-for-profit, 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. This research is used to develop educational materials for drivers, pedestrians, bicyclists and other road users. Visit www.aaafoundation.org for more information.