Distracted Driving Is More Dangerous Than People Realize, New Research Shows

August 17, 2023

In 2021 more than 3,500 drivers in the U.S. alone died in traffic accidents linked to distracted driving. Using a cell phone is the primary source of distraction, but entering navigational information, trying to eat and performing other such activities can be just as risky. A new study in the Journal of Experimental Psychology: Applied suggests that distracted driving is even more unsafe than previously thought.

Multitasking has a hidden cost for drivers that past analyses have not taken into account. In two experiments, participants between the ages of 18 and 58 completed a driving-related activity while also performing a distracting task. Cognitive psychologists led by David Strayer of the University of Utah found that distraction depleted participants’ ability to pay attention to their driving for at least half a minute after the distraction ended. That extended effect implies that the number of traffic accidents caused by distracted driving could be substantially higher than current estimates indicate.