

Voice-Activated Technology Is Called Safety Risk for Drivers

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The New York Times:

As concerns have intensified about driver distraction from electronic gadgets, automakers have increasingly introduced voice-activated systems that allow drivers to keep their hands on the wheel and eyes on the road. But a new study says that the most advanced of these systems actually create a different, and worse, safety risk, by taking a driver's mind, if not eyes, off the road.

These systems let drivers use voice commands to dictate a text, send an e-mail and even update a Facebook page. Automakers say the systems not only address safety concerns, but also cater to consumers who increasingly want to stay connected on the Internet while driving.

“What we really have on our hands is a looming public safety crisis with the proliferation of these vehicles,” said Yolanda Cade, a spokeswoman for AAA, whose Foundation for Highway Safety released the study on Wednesday. She characterized the rush to equip cars with Internet-enabled systems as “an arms race.”

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The research was led by David Strayer, a neuroscientist at the University of Utah who for two decades has applied the principles of attention science to driver behavior. His research has showed, for example, that talking on a phone while driving creates the same level of crash risk as someone with a 0.08 blood-alcohol level, the legal level for intoxication across the country.

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