



New Research Shows One of Every Six Drivers in School Zones is Distracted

*Unbelted, afternoon, and female drivers are more likely to be distracted –
putting child pedestrians at risk*

[Washington, D.C.] — As kids head back to school, new research from Safe Kids USA shows that one out of every six drivers in school zones is distracted by the use of cell phones, eating, drinking, smoking, reaching behind, grooming and reading. The study also found that unbelted drivers are 34 percent more likely to be distracted than belted drivers, afternoon drivers are 22 percent more likely to be distracted than morning drivers, and females are 21 percent more likely to be distracted than males.

The study, “Characteristics of Distracted Drivers in School Zones: A National Report,” consisted of more than 40,000 observational road-side surveys conducted by local Safe Kids researchers in 20 locations across the United States. Use of electronics (such as cell phones, PDAs and Smartphones) was the leading category of distraction while driving at 9.8 percent. This is a 2.5 percent increase over a 2008 National Highway Traffic Safety Administration survey that showed a rate of 7.3 percent.

“The public expects drivers to be on their best behavior when they are near schools, however the new study shows the opposite is true when it comes to distracted driving,” said Moira Donahue, Director of the Walk This Way program, Safe Kids’ pedestrian safety program. “With recent research demonstrating that the driving skills of a distracted driver are as bad as or worse than an intoxicated driver, the overall relevance of this study is clear. Almost one in six drivers in a school zone behaves like a drunk driver.”

The finding that afternoon drivers are 22 percent more likely to be distracted is significant because throughout the year one in three child pedestrian deaths occur between 3 and 7 p.m., making afternoons the most dangerous time for children to walk. Drivers who were not wearing a seat belt were the most likely group in the study to also be driving distracted, meaning drivers engaging in one risky behavior are more likely to engage in multiple unsafe driving behaviors.

While the debate over laws governing hand-held electronic device use while driving continues, simply having a law on the books may somewhat decrease the prevalence of distracted driving. The study, which covered communities in 15 states showed that those states with laws regulating cell phone or hand-held electronic device use in a vehicle are 13 percent less likely to have distracted drivers in school zones.

“Multitasking while driving can have deadly consequences,” said Donahue. “Drivers need to shut off their phones and pay attention to the road, especially in areas that are filled with children.”

Safe Kids Walk This Way, a grassroots pedestrian safety initiative in more than 600 schools nationwide, is made possible through support from program sponsor FedEx Corp. (NYSE: FDX). Through this year-round program, children learn safe pedestrian behaviors; school communities identify the pedestrian hazards surrounding their schools; and school pedestrian safety committees and task forces lead efforts to educate pedestrians and drivers about safe behaviors, enforce traffic laws and improve environments for child pedestrians. The study on distracted drivers in school zones was made possible through a grant from FedEx.

For more information about the new report on distracted drivers, tips for drivers and pedestrians or background on the Walk This Way program, call 202-662-0600 or visit www.usa.safekids.org/wtw/.

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Safe Kids USA is a member of Safe Kids Worldwide, a global network of organizations with the mission of preventing unintentional childhood injury, the leading cause of death and disability to children ages 1 to 14. More than 600 coalitions in the United States and nineteen member countries worldwide bring together health and safety experts, educators, corporations, foundations, governments and volunteers to educate and protect families.