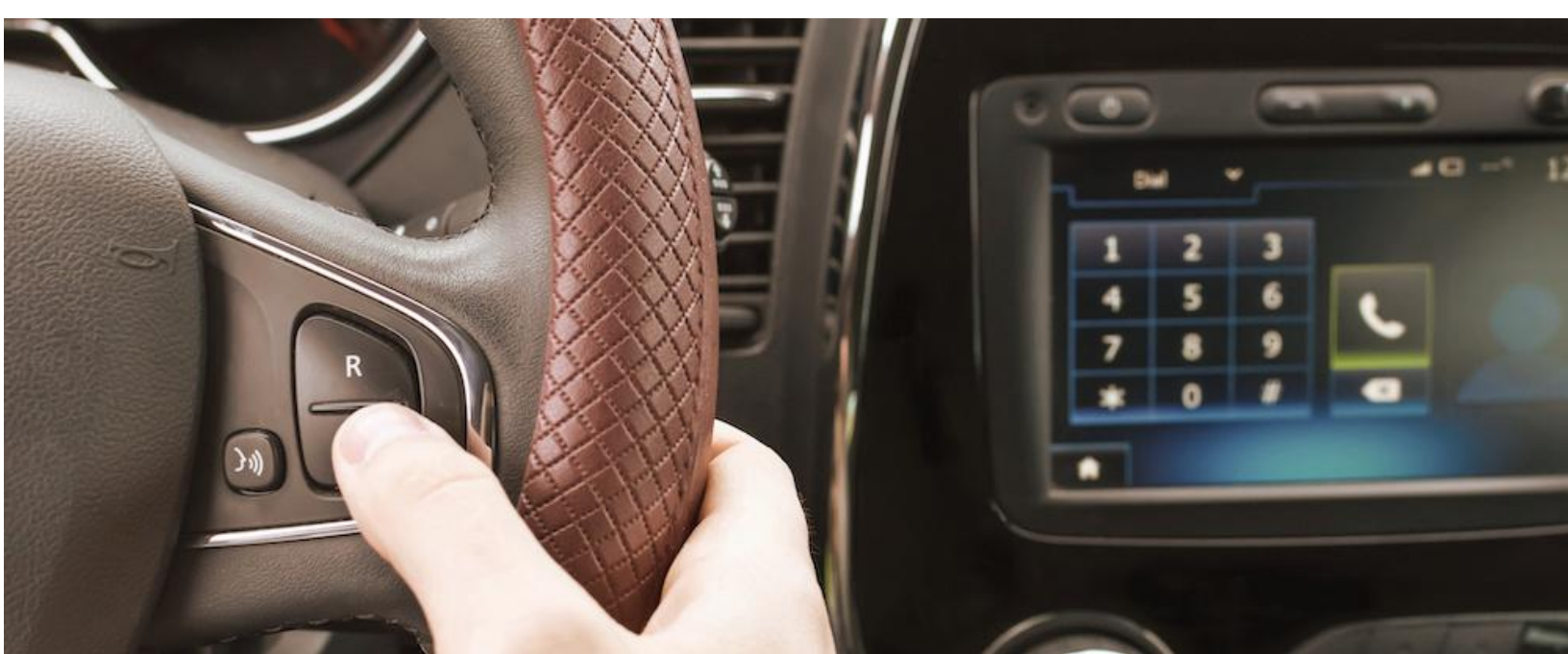


ARTICLE

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Study: Are Hands-Free Devices In Cars Safe For Drivers?



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New studies from the AAA's Foundation for Traffic Safety show the dangers associated with using hands-free devices while driving.

In the state of New Jersey, over 240,000 traffic accidents occurred during 2013 according to the State of New Jersey Department of Transportation. While the report does not provide information on how many of those accidents are related to driver distraction, people in Rochelle Park are all too aware of the problem.

One of the biggest factors contributing to driving and distraction is the widespread use of mobile devices such as cellphones. In recent years, auto manufacturers have teamed up with technology companies and begun installing in-vehicle systems that are controlled by voice. These systems allow drivers to send emails, texts, and make phone calls. Manufacturers claim that this technology reduces a driver's risk of getting into an accident, but recent studies state that this is not entirely true.

Cognitive Distraction

The American Automobile Association's Foundation for Traffic Safety began looking into the area of cognitive distraction, which is when the mind focuses on other things. The foundation points out that little attention has been given to this type of distraction and its purpose was to look at different sources of distraction and how these sources affected drivers' cognitive abilities.

The first study conducted by the foundation consisted of three types of driving environment experiments conducted in a laboratory, a driving simulator and an instrumental vehicle. Volunteers were fitted with recorders and sensors to capture information, and then asked to engage in several behaviors while driving. These behaviors include the following:

- Talking with passengers
- Listening to a radio
- Listening to an audiobook
- Using a hands-free cellphone
- Using a hand-held cellphone
- Using a voice to text in-vehicle system

To create a rating skill, researchers also measured drivers' cognitive activity as the drivers simply drove without engaging in any other behavior.

In the second study, researchers focused only on voice-based technology in vehicles in which the systems were turned on through a touch on the vehicle's steering wheel. Participants in this study were asked to use five different systems, giving commands to these systems to make a call to a contact on the list, vocally dial a phone number, change a radio station and play a CD. As the participants used these systems, they drove through a residential neighborhood to provide a real driving environment.

Findings

The first study found that using hands-free cellphones was less cognitively distracting than using a handheld cellphone or talking to a passenger. However, the voice-activated systems rated the highest in cognitive distraction. Participants missed visual cues, showed a slower reaction time to potentially dangerous situations, and did not scan their driving environment as often.

In the second study, researchers found that some systems required more time from drivers than others. One of those was Chevy's MyLink system, which rated the highest for cognitive workload in voice/contact dialing and radio tuning. Systems that were based on menu choices were also more cognitively distracting to drivers, rating at the same level as speech to text systems. Researchers pointed out that it was possible, with adjustments to the technology, to lower drivers' cognitive workload but manufacturers seem reluctant to make such changes.

When drivers in Rochelle Park, Hackensack, Paramus, and Bergen County are distracted by other things, they not only pose a risk to themselves and their passengers, but to everyone else around them on the road. People who are injured by distracted drivers should [speak with an attorney](#) to seek financial justice.