

Fatal Crashes Involving Distracted Drivers in Washington, 2004-2008

How Significant is the Problem?

On Washington roadways, there were 739 fatal crashes between 2004 and 2008 involving a distracted driver. These crashes resulted in a total of 801 deaths, which is an average of 160 deaths per year. This accounts for 27.2% (801 of 2,942) of all traffic deaths during the five year period.

Who Dies in Crashes Involving Distracted Drivers?

Nearly 90% of distracted driver involved deaths were vehicle drivers and passengers. Pedestrian deaths accounted for 8.9% of deaths.

Person Type	Deaths	Percentage
Driver	526	65.7%
Passenger	193	24.1%
Pedestrian	71	8.9%
Pedalcyclist	8	1.0%
Other Non-motorist	3	0.4%
Total	801	100.0%

A quarter of distracted driving deaths were between age 16 and 25 (207 of 801; 25.8%). Persons over age 70 represented 13.7% of distracted driving deaths (110 of 801).

Age Group	Male	Female	Total
< 16	2.9%	2.4%	5.2%
16-20	7.7%	3.6%	11.4%
21-25	11.1%	3.4%	14.5%
26-30	5.7%	2.2%	8.0%
31-35	5.0%	1.7%	6.7%
36-40	4.4%	1.4%	5.7%
41-45	4.5%	2.0%	6.5%
46-50	5.9%	1.9%	7.7%
51-55	5.2%	2.0%	7.2%
56-60	4.2%	1.6%	5.9%
61-70	4.6%	2.6%	7.2%
71+	8.1%	5.6%	13.7%
Age unknown	0.1%	0.0%	0.1%
Total	69.5%	30.5%	100.0%

What are the Contributing Factors?

Road and Area Type

Three out of five deaths involving a distracted driver were in rural areas (495 of 801; 61.8%). Combining rural and urban roadways, US/State Highways accounted for 40.3% (222 of 801) of all distracted driver involved deaths.

Road Classification	Rural	Urban	Total
Interstates	5.7%	5.1%	10.9%
US/State Highways	32.0%	8.4%	40.3%
County Roads	21.2%	6.2%	27.7%
City Streets	0.2%	18.1%	18.4%
Other/Unknown	2.6%	0.1%	2.7%
Total by Area Type	61.8%	38.0%	100.0%

Location

The Top 5 counties represent 46.1% (369 of 801) of all deaths involving a distracted driver in Washington.

Top 5 Counties	Deaths	% of State Total
King	126	15.7%
Pierce	78	9.7%
Yakima	65	8.1%
Snohomish	55	6.9%
Thurston	45	5.6%

Time

The greatest number of deaths involving distracted drivers occurred between 3:00 PM and 5:59 PM.

Time of Day	Deaths	Percentage
6:00 AM to 8:59 AM	66	8.2%
9:00 AM to 11:59 AM	97	12.1%
Noon to 2:59 PM	123	15.4%
3:00 PM to 5:59 PM	184	23.0%
6:00 PM to 8:59 PM	111	13.9%
9:00 PM to 11:59 PM	82	10.2%
Midnight to 2:59 AM	98	12.2%
3:00 AM to 5:59 AM	40	5.0%

What are the Contributing Factors?

One-third (276 of 801; 34.5%) of deaths involving a distracted driver occurred on Friday or Saturday. An additional 15% were on Sunday.

Day of Week	Deaths	Percentage
Sunday	125	15.6%
Monday	106	13.2%
Tuesday	93	11.6%
Wednesday	95	11.9%
Thursday	106	13.2%
Friday	136	17.0%
Saturday	140	17.5%

Two out of five (319 of 801; 39.8%) deaths involving distracted drivers occurred during the weekend, between 6:00 PM Friday and 5:59 AM Monday.

Over 20% of all deaths involving distracted drivers occurred in July and August. The fewest deaths occurred during between January and March.

Month of Year	Deaths	Percentage
January	53	6.6%
February	41	5.1%
March	50	6.2%
April	57	7.1%
May	65	8.1%
June	71	8.9%
July	91	11.4%
August	106	13.2%
September	74	9.2%
October	77	9.6%
November	57	7.1%
December	59	7.4%

Crash Type

Two out of five deaths involving a distracted driver were single vehicle crashes (328 of 801; 40.9%).

The Driver

There were 758 distracted drivers involved in fatal crashes between 2004 and 2008. Three-quarters (584 of 801; 77.0%) of these drivers were male.

Age Group	Male	Female	Total
16-20	10.0%	3.7%	13.7%
21-25	13.1%	3.6%	16.6%
26-30	7.9%	1.6%	9.5%
31-35	8.2%	1.7%	9.9%
36-40	5.0%	1.8%	6.9%
41-45	5.4%	2.2%	7.7%
46-50	5.9%	1.5%	7.4%
51-55	5.1%	1.2%	6.3%
56-60	3.8%	1.1%	4.9%
61-70	5.3%	1.6%	6.9%
71+	7.1%	2.8%	9.9%
Age unknown	0.1%	0.0%	0.4%
Total	77.0%	22.7%	100.0%

Each driver may have up to four factors contributing to the crash reported by investigators. Over one-third of distracted drivers involved in fatal crashes were also impaired by alcohol and/or other drugs and over one-quarter were speeding.

Common Driver Errors	Drivers	Percentage
Alcohol or drug impairment	284	37.5%
Speeding	225	29.7%
Failure to yield right of way	114	15.0%

The majority (64.6%) of distracted drivers involved in fatal crashes were operating a passenger auto, SUV, or van.

Vehicle Type Operated	Drivers	Percentage
Passenger auto, SUV, or van	490	64.6%
Pick up/light truck	135	17.8%
Motorcycle	78	10.3%
Bus, motor home, or heavy truck	47	6.2%
ATV	8	1.1%
Total	758	100.0%

Three out of five (490 of 801; 64.6%) of distracted drivers involved these crashes had no passengers.

Seat Belt Use

Nearly one-third (29.6%) of these distracted passenger vehicle drivers were unbelted.

Of the 547 passenger vehicle occupant deaths involving distracted drivers, about 41.1% were not using seat belts compared to 43.0% of all Washington passenger vehicle occupant deaths.

Data source for all figures is Washington Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS) year 2004 through 2008. Data for 2008 is preliminary and subject to change as more information becomes available.