Nationwide®

Steering Clear of Navigation Accidents

Program your destinations while you are parked. A 2017 study on distracted driving found programing of in-vehicle GPS navigation systems while driving took an average of 40 seconds to complete.[1] At 65 MPH you travel three quarters of a mile in 40 seconds!

Navigation systems are often thought of as a tool to enhance safety. In theory, they are less likely to be distracted if they are not looking for road signs or building numbers. However, Nationwide is seeing an increase in the number of serious accidents where the proximate cause of the accident is distraction due to use of the navigation system.

Failing to yield, lane change and rear-end collisions are common when a driver is distracted while looking at a navigation screen or manipulating the navigation device. Accidents also occur when the navigation system is "late" in providing visual or audio directions and the driver chooses to brake or change lanes aggressively to make a last minute turn.

Distraction Management

- Distracted driving policies place considerable emphasis on cell phone-related distractions such as dialing and texting but often fail to address other distractions. These policies should also address use of navigations systems, infotainment systems and non-technology-related distractions such as eating, reading, reaching for objects, etc.
- When selecting navigation devices, organizations should select devices that do not allow programming while driving.
- Technology blockers should be considered to minimize the ability of the driver to manipulate the navigation device while driving. Additional information can be found in Distracted Driving Prevention Technology.
- Drivers should be trained in the safe use of navigation systems as covered below.

Vehicle infotainment System Navigation

Many vehicle manufacturers include, or provide as an option, navigation systems as part of the vehicle infotainment system. An advantage of these systems is that they are typically locked down and the target location can only be set when the car is parked. The navigation screens are typically bigger and automatically adjust to day or night lighting conditions well.

A common problem with these built-in systems is that the screen is often positioned low on the dashboard requiring the driver to divert their eyes from the road for an extended period of time. Some of these systems allow for voice activated control or changes to the navigation which sounds helpful, but often results in substantial distraction.

[1] Visual and Cognitive Demands of Using In-Vehicle Infotainment Systems, September 2017, AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety.

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Portable Navigation Devices or Phone Applications (Apps)

It is common for a driver to use a portable navigation unit or phone for navigation. These devices typically have smaller screens, which require the driver to focus their attention for longer periods of time. Another disadvantage is they generally allow programming to be made while the vehicle is in motion. Strict policy guidance is needed when allowing use of these devices.

Driver Policy Guidance

1. The GPS unit should be placed in a mount to prevent it from moving or requiring the driver to have to reach for it.
2. The mount should be positioned above the dashboard so viewing the screen does not divert eyes from the forward roadway. It should be positioned so as not to substantially block the field of vision or create a substantial blind spot.
3. The audio feature should be on and loud enough to be heard over the radio/music so that the driver does not have to look at the screen for directions.
4. The destination should be set when safely parked and not readjusted while driving.
5. The driver should not rely solely on the GPS. They can be wrong on occasion. When setting the location, the driver should review the full trip on the screen so they have a good understanding of where the trip will take them. Understanding the route they will be taking minimizes the need for a driver to "check" the screen mid-trip when they question whether the navigation is sending them in the wrong direction.
6. Any time the driver questions where the navigation is taking them, they should pull over before checking.
7. Limit glances at the navigation screen to less than two seconds, preferably one or less.
8. Direct a passenger to make any navigation changes when driving.
9. If system directions are delayed, and driver cannot safely react to the suggested change in course, they should not attempt to make the maneuver. Follow the recalculated route to your destination or pull over to examine an alternative route. Do not make a hasty illegal u-turn.
10. Update device software annually with current maps.
11. Large trucks require specialized GPS systems for truck routes.

Limit glances at the navigation screen to less than two seconds, preferably one or less. Taking your eyes away from the forward roadway for more than two seconds greatly increases risk.[2]

[2] Distraction in commercial trucks and buses: assessing prevalence and risk in conjunction with crashes and near crashes, (Document No. FMCSA-RRR-10-049) Washington, DC: Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration.

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