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Hannah Winston Palm Beach Post Staff Writer



Driving distracted: Survey finds more smartphone use behind the wheel



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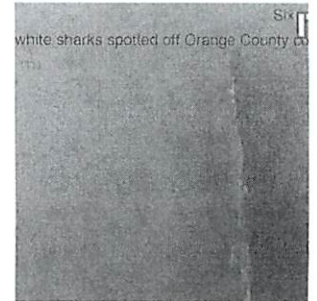
6:48 p.m. Tuesday, May 19, 2015 | Filed in: News



Richard Graulich

A woman on her cell phone drives west on Okeechobee Boulevard near Congress Avenue in West Palm Beach on May 19, 2015. (Richard Graulich / The Palm Beach Post)

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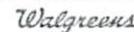
A new survey shows drivers nationwide are increasingly distracted by their smart phones, and that news alarms a local official and emergency workers.

The survey, released Tuesday, is part of AT&T's "It Can Wait" campaign against distracted driving. It found

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that not only are drivers admitting to texting while driving, but the use of Facebook, Snapchat and other social media apps behind the wheel has increased across the country.

Of the more than 2,000 drivers surveyed, nearly four in 10 use social media while driving and one in 10 admit to video chatting when they are behind the wheel.

For state Rep. Irving Slosberg, D-Boca Raton, "it's crazy" what people are doing in the driver's seat.

"It's a free-for-all out there," he said. "They're texting, GPSing, they're Instagramming and on Facebook."

The only ways he believes distracted driving can be curtailed is for car manufacturers to put devices in vehicles that would disable phones while on the road or a change in the law.

"It's not getting any better," he said. "We need tougher laws."

In Florida, it is illegal to text while driving. But it is a secondary violation, which means drivers can only be cited if they are stopped for another offense, like speeding.

While texting and driving remains the biggest distraction with 59 percent of people surveyed reading texts and 43 percent admitting they've sent text messages, 17 percent admitted to taking a selfie while driving, according to the survey. Of social media applications, Facebook rules with 26 percent of participants looking at their profiles. Twitter and Instagram are neck and neck with 14 percent and 13 percent of drivers glancing at their phones to check for updates.

Driving, as defined by the survey, includes being stopped in traffic, at a stoplight or in motion. The drivers surveyed reported that they own a smart phone and drive at least once a day.

Of all the drivers surveyed, nearly one-third said they can safely text, and drive and 27 percent said they can safely shoot video from behind the wheel.

Dr. Michael West, a trauma surgeon at St. Mary's Medical Center, said that's just not the case.

"We're seeing an increase in the (trauma accident) numbers directly related to distractions while driving," he said Tuesday.

West estimates a quarter of all traumatic car accidents are related to using a cellphone while driving.


West said teen-agers are now more likely to be killed in an accident caused by distracted driving than from drunk driving, which he finds "very surprising."

He said the only way they'll be able to change that is through education.

"Many people underestimated how big of a problem this would be," he said.

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to block son's circumcision

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More than 17 percent of survey respondents said they glanced or posted to social media because of an "addiction," while 38 percent said they looked at emails and texts for fear of missing something important.

Florida Highway Patrol Sgt. Mark Wysocky said he hasn't noticed an increase in distraction locally, but he said it doesn't surprise him with improving smart phone technology.

"Unfortunately, it's what's happening," he said. "But we hope we can change (that.)"

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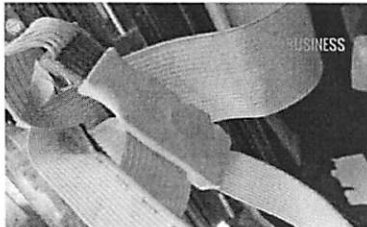


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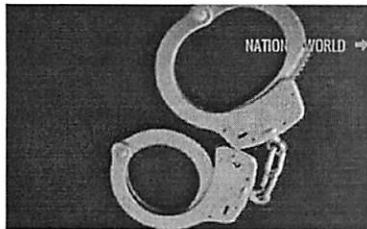
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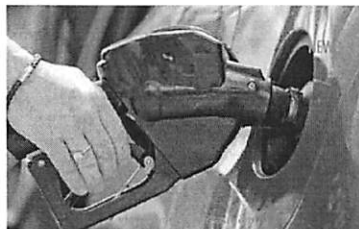
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