



# Trends in Distracted Driving

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# Distracted driving

- > Distracted driving has become a significant road safety concern worldwide.
- > Distracted driving can be defined as the act of driving while performing another activity that takes one's attention away from the road:
  - » Grooming;
  - » Eating;
  - » Using a GPS navigation system;
  - » Changing the radio;
  - » Using a mobile phone, etc.

# Distracted driving: National Fatality Database

- > Data from TIRF's National Fatality Database.
- > Developed in early 1970s.
- > Used to examine a variety of contemporary road safety issues.
- > Only road safety database in Canada that includes both: (1) police-reported data and (2) coroners' and medical examiners' reports.
- > Sponsored by Desjardins.

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**DISTRACTION-RELATED FATAL COLLISIONS, 2000-2016**  
*Traffic Injury Research Foundation, September 2019*  
 By Steve Brown, Ward G.M. Vanlaar, and Robyn D. Robertson

**Introduction**

In recent years, distracted driving has been increasingly prioritized in road safety planning in Canada. Some Canadian jurisdictions have reported that distracted driving fatalities have surpassed impaired driving fatalities, although some of this growth may be due to improvements in data collection (Robertson et al. 2017).

This fact sheet, sponsored by Desjardins, examines the magnitude and trends regarding the role of driver distraction in motor vehicle fatalities in Canada from 2000 to 2016. Data from TIRF's National Fatality Database were used to prepare this fact sheet which explores trends in the role of driver distraction among fatally injured victims, and the characteristics of fatally injured distracted drivers.<sup>1</sup> Other topics that are examined include characteristics of distraction-related crashes resulting in fatalities such as time of day, day of week, season, and the number of vehicle occupants.

A fatality is defined as distraction-related if at least one of the drivers in the crash (either dying or surviving) was considered to be distracted. Distraction can be based upon either police-reported collision data or coroner/medical examiner narrative information. A fatally injured distracted driver is a person who dies in a collision and was considered to have been distracted just prior to, or during, the collision. In this fact sheet, TIRF's reporting upon the role of distraction refers to its presence and does not suggest that distraction was the primary or sole cause of the collision.

Distracted driving has routinely been associated with phoning or texting. However, other behaviours or events that distract a person from the driving task include being engaged with entertainment or communication devices, engaging with passengers in the vehicle, or eating, smoking or personal grooming while driving. It should be noted that an investigating officer may code a driver's condition as 'distracted, inattentive'. This suggests that there was a general lack of attention exhibited by the driver but there was no specific behaviour identified by the officer.

**Distracted driving trends over time among all fatally injured victims**

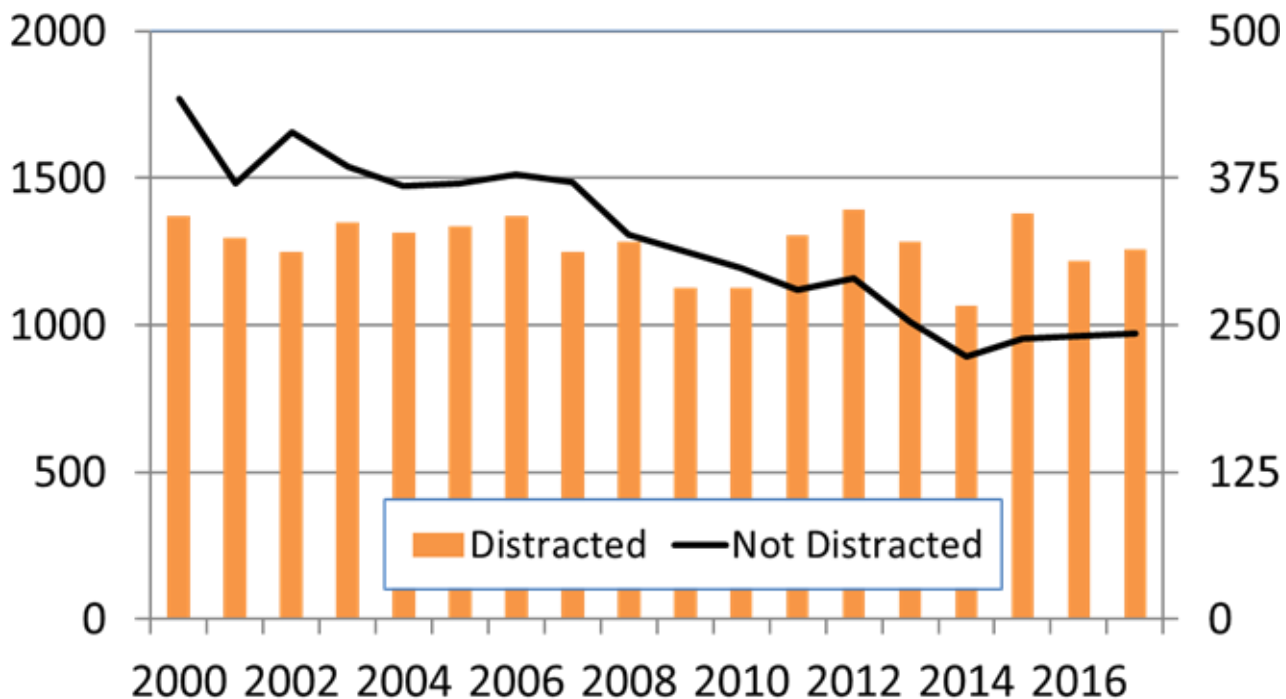
The number of distraction and non-distraction-related fatalities in Canada between 2000 and 2016 is shown in Figure 1. Non-distraction-related fatalities are represented by the vertical bars and plotted against the axis on the left while distraction related fatalities are represented by the solid line and plotted against the axis on the right. During this 17-year period, the number of distraction-related fatalities gradually decreased from 354 in 2000 to a low of 269 in 2014, rose to 345 in 2015, and

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# Distraction-related fatalities

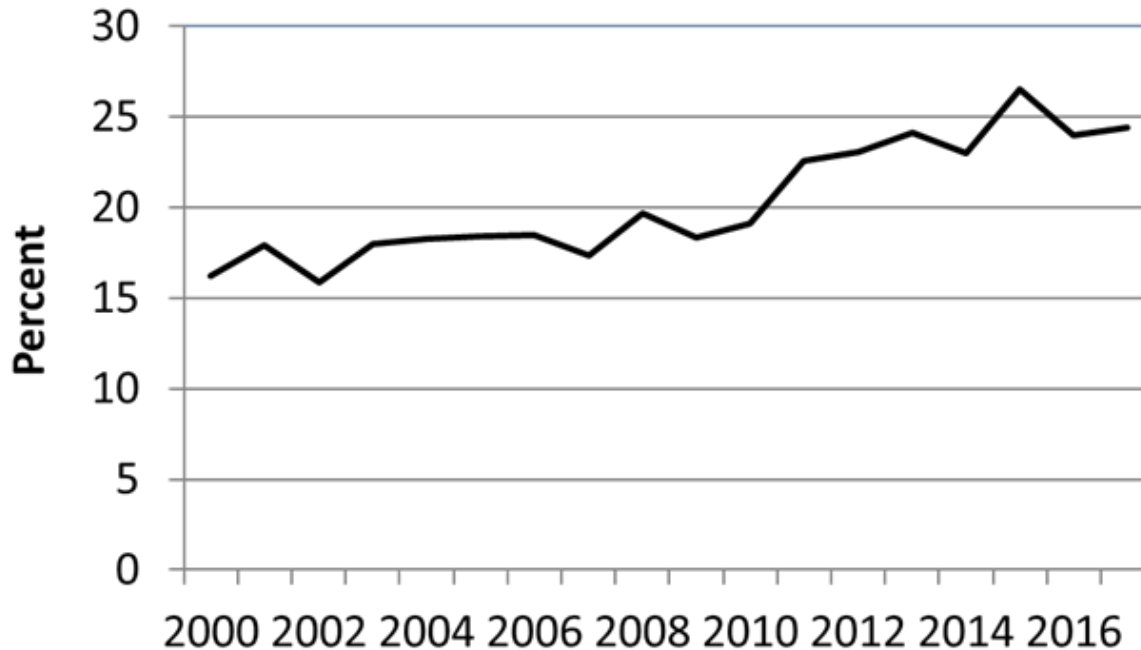


Source: Brown et al.  
(unpublished)



# Distraction-related fatalities

**Percentage of fatalities that involved distraction - Canada, 2000-2017**



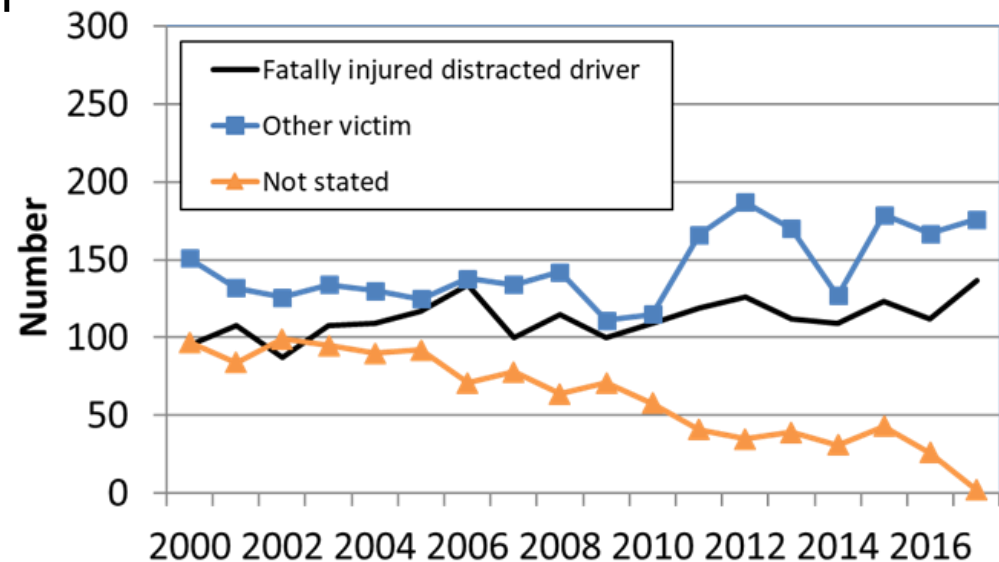
Source: Brown et al.  
(unpublished)



# Categories of distraction-related fatalities

- > From 2000 to 2017, most fatalities involved distraction on the part of the other driver.

**Number of fatalities by category of distraction – Canada, 2000-2017**



Source: Brown et al.  
(unpublished)



# Characteristics of fatally injured distracted drivers

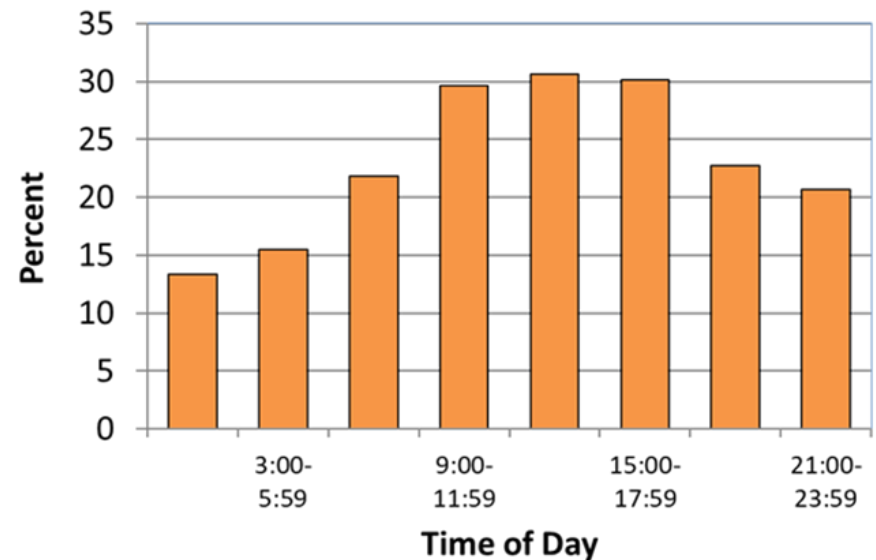
- > Gender
  - » 13.8% of fatally injured male drivers were distracted compared to 18.2% of fatally injured female drivers.
- > Age
  - » Drivers aged 16-19 (19.9%) and 65 and older (16.6%) were the most likely to have been distracted.



# Crash characteristics

- > Time of day
  - » A larger percentage of distraction-related fatalities occurred throughout the workday.

## Number of distraction-related fatalities by time of day - Canada, 2012-2017



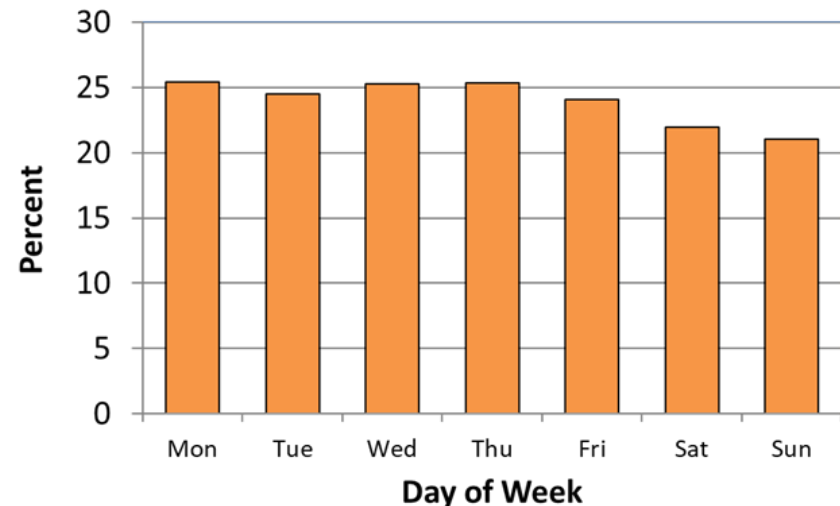
Source: Brown et al.  
(unpublished)



# Crash characteristics

- > Day of week
  - » The percentage of fatalities that were distraction-related were most common in collisions occurring on Mondays and Thursdays (25.4% each).
  - » Steady decrease until Sundays when 21.0% of fatalities were distraction-related.

## Percentage of distraction-related fatalities by day of week - Canada, 2012-2017



Source: Brown et al.  
(unpublished)




# Summary

- > Distracted driving collisions exhibit specific patterns that are different from other types of collisions.
- > They do not occur at the same time of day or day of week as alcohol-related collisions.
- > The demographic characteristics of distracted drivers and drinking drivers do not necessarily correspond with one another.
- > Tailored enforcement activities and education initiatives based on these patterns.

# Distracted driving: Road Safety Monitor (RSM)

- > RSM is an annual public opinion survey conducted by TIRF.
- > The RSM takes the pulse of the nation on key road safety issues by means of an online survey of a random, representative sample of Canadian drivers.
- > Sponsored by Beer Canada and Desjardins.

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**ROAD SAFETY MONITOR 2018: DISTRACTED DRIVING ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES, 2004-2018**  
*Traffic Injury Research Foundation, October 2019*  
 By: Craig Lyon, Ward G.M. Vanlaar, and Robyn D. Robertson

**Introduction**  
 This fact sheet summarizes trends in attitudes about, and practices related to, distracted driving, based upon data from the Road Safety Monitor (RSM). The RSM is an annual public opinion survey conducted by the Traffic Injury Research Foundation (TIRF) under sponsorship from Beer Canada and Desjardins. The survey takes the pulse of the nation on key road safety issues by means of an online survey of a random, representative sample of Canadian drivers.

The objective of the publication is to examine trends over time and the current status of beliefs and practices of drivers related to distracted driving. The increased use of cell phones has led to growing interest in driver distraction, primarily involving the use of cell phones for texting and talking. It is important to acknowledge, however, that distracted driving is not limited to cell phone use but includes any activity that takes the attention of drivers away from the driving task.

Distracted driving has become one of the most significant road safety concerns worldwide, with mobile devices and other in-vehicle technology being at the forefront of discussion. In North America, distraction is estimated to be a factor in approximately 20% to 30% of motor vehicle collisions (Bowman & Robertson, 2016).

A previous comparison of Canadian drivers' self-reported habits with drivers in the United States and Europe (Woods-Fry et al., 2018) showed Canadians were less likely to report they had talked on a handheld mobile device while driving (25% for Canada, 49.7% for the United States, and 37.8% for Europe). In the same study, a significantly larger proportion of American drivers indicated that they had sent a text message or email while driving compared with Canadian and European drivers (35.3% for the United States, versus 24% for Canada, and 27.2% for Europe). The proportions of those who reported they had read a text message or email while driving were also significantly different (29.4% for Canada, 41.6% for the United States, and 36.4% for Europe), with Canadians reporting the lowest incidence of this behaviour.

**Concern about distracted driving**  
 In 2018, Canadians were asked how concerned they were with drivers using cell phones (either handheld or hands-free), distracted drivers and drivers texting messages on their phones while driving. These questions were also asked in previous years. Respondents were asked to rate their concern ranging from 1 (not a problem at all) to 6 (an extremely serious problem); for scoring purposes, respondents were coded as being concerned about an issue if they chose five or six.

ROAD SAFETY MONITOR 2018 | DISTRACTED DRIVING ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES, 2004-2018



## RSM data

- > Driver concern about distraction has risen dramatically from 33% in 2004 to 76% in 2018.
- > Concern about cell phone use while driving showed a smaller but significant increase from 61.3% in 2004 to 68.9% in 2020, with a peak of 76.4% in 2017.
- > Concern about texting has decreased slightly from a high of 89.9% in 2010 to 78.5% in 2020.
- > Of note, there has been a decrease in concern for all three indicators since 2017.



## RSM data

- > Significantly more Canadians reported talking on hands-free phone while driving in 2020 (31.5%) compared to 2010 (21.7%).
- > Fewer Canadians (8.6%) indicated they often talked on their handheld phone while driving in 2010 compared to 2020 (13.6%).
- > A significant 133% increase in the percentage of respondents who reported they often texted on their phone while driving occurred between 2010 (4.8%) and 2020 (11.2%).



# Summary

- > Concerning uptick in the percentage of Canadians that reported talking on a handheld device while driving and the percentage that reported texting while driving.
  - > The percentage of drivers who continue to report texting and driving has more than doubled in the past decade.
  - > Increasing proportion of Canadians self-reported talking on their handheld phone while driving in 2020, increasing every year for the past three years.



# Road safety implications

- > Distracted driving has been increasingly prioritized in road safety planning in Canada with some jurisdictions reporting that distracted driving fatalities have surpassed impaired driving fatalities.
- > Distracted driving collisions exhibit specific patterns and require enforcement activities that are tailored to this road safety issue.
- > Education initiatives and public awareness campaigns that utilize behavioural change strategies are essential to reduce distracted driving.



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