

Third-Party Distracted Driving

NWRA POSITION

NWRA supports the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's (NHTSA) efforts to combat distracted driving caused by texting, phone use, and alcohol or drugs as well as enhanced enforcement of state distracted driving laws by state and local law enforcement agencies.

BACKGROUND

Safety is the number one value for the waste and recycling industry. The goal each day is for every worker and driver to go home safely at the end of their shifts, without a crash, injury or fatality. Our work is focused on making collection, processing, and disposal operations less dangerous by encouraging safety training, including the industry's first Driver Certification program, as well as providing assistance in complying with regulations and company safety rules and policies.

Despite these industry efforts, distracted driving by motorists with whom they share the road puts waste and recycling drivers and workers at risk every day. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) has named the waste and recycling collector as the fifth most dangerous occupation. Two-thirds (68 percent) of the fatalities suffered by these hard-working men and women were the result of transportation incidents, many of which were caused by inattentive or distracted drivers who failed to yield to waste and recycling collection vehicles.

According to NHTSA, distracted driving is "any activity that diverts attention from driving, including talking or texting on your phone, eating and drinking, talking to people in your vehicle, fiddling with the stereo, entertainment or navigation system—anything that takes your attention away from the task of safe driving." It is estimated that during daylight hours approximately 481,000 drivers are using handheld cell phones while driving, creating significant potential for injury or death.

NHTSA reports that 3,450 people were killed by distracted drivers in 2016 and 562 of these fatalities were not occupants of a vehicle but rather pedestrians, bicyclists, and others including waste and recycling industry employees. In 2015, distracted drivers were responsible for 391,000 injuries in motor vehicle crashes. Teens were the largest age group reported as distracted at the time of fatal crashes.

Driving requires the full attention of motorists. Texting in particular poses a danger since sending or reading a text takes one's eyes off the road for an average of 4.6 seconds.

Traveling at 55 MPH while texting is the equivalent of driving the length of a football field with your eyes closed.

NHTSA is engaged in several efforts to educate Americans about the dangers of distracted driving including public service announcements, social media campaigns, “Distracted Driving Awareness Month” every April, and partnerships with state and local police departments to enforce laws against distracted driving.

These law enforcement officials are also undertaking the difficult task of enhanced enforcement of distracted driving laws. This is complicated by the need to observe the offense before making a traffic stop since, unlike with impaired driving, the prohibited behavior has typically ended once a driver is pulled over.

TALKING POINTS

- Third party distracted drivers are the greatest threat to the lives and safety of waste and recycling drivers and workers, leading BLS to name them as the fifth most dangerous occupation.
- NWRA supports the continuation and expansion of NHTSA’s efforts to combat distracted driving.
- State and local law enforcement play a key role in enhancing enforcement of distracted driving laws.