

## **New Zealanders driven to distraction behind the wheel – AA Insurance**

Two thirds of young drivers say they txt while driving

Auckland – 2 April 2008 – Calling and txting on mobile phones is driving New Zealanders to distraction according to new research from leading insurer AA Insurance.

The 2008 AA Insurance Drivers Index, which surveyed 2573 New Zealand drivers aged 18-75, reports that one in four women – and one in five men – say they txt while driving.

“New Zealanders have embraced mobile phones as a means of immediate and convenient communication but our research shows they are not getting the message in terms of driving safely,” says Chris Curtin, CEO, AA Insurance. “There is far greater risk when txting while driving compared with talking on a mobile phone while driving, because your eyes are focused on the screen instead of the road.”

The risks are particularly high for young drivers, as almost two thirds of drivers aged 18-24 reported sending txts while driving, more than double that of drivers over 25 (63.3 percent of drivers aged 18-24 compared with only 23.6 percent of drivers over 25).

Mobile phones have started to appear as a driver distraction in motor accident claims. “The truth is that txting slows driver reaction times and increases the risk of an accident,” adds Mr Curtin.

Some 41 percent of drivers also report talking on a mobile phone while driving without using a hands-free kit. This category is also strongly skewed towards younger drivers, with 59.5 percent of people in the 18-24 age group saying they drive while using a mobile phone without a hands-free kit.

Some regional differences were revealed by the 2008 AA Insurance Drivers Index. Aucklanders are more likely to use their mobile phones without a hands-free kit than others around New Zealand, while Wellingtonians are the least likely to send txt messages while driving.

AA Insurance found mobile phones are not the only type of driver distraction. The 2008 AA Insurance Drivers Index also shows that music can be a significant distraction for drivers. Fifty-four percent of people surveyed agreed that they have lost concentration while changing a CD, tape or radio station while driving.

MP3 players are a popular way to play music but drivers report them as less distracting than CDs or radios, with only 8 percent of those surveyed saying they've become distracted from driving by their MP3 player. However, some 17.7 percent of drivers aged 18-24 report being distracted from driving by their MP3 player.

With the ability to shuffle and sort thousands of songs, photographs and videos, these miniature devices can distract more drivers as they become more widely used. Drivers should let their passengers operate the MP3 player. If they are travelling alone they should leave the player in a shuffle mode or refrain from changing songs and albums until their next break. Using headphones is particularly dangerous as drivers wearing headphones are less likely to hear what's going on around them, such as horns, braking, sirens and other road noise.

Furthermore, 66 percent of people surveyed eat while driving.

Applying make-up while driving appears to be one of those activities more often observed in others than by oneself. Only 8 percent of those women surveyed stated that they had applied make-up while driving, yet 66 percent of all drivers said they often see someone else apply make-up while driving. Applying make-up while driving is unwise, as you're focused on the mirror rather than the road.

However, it's not just what the driver is doing inside the car that can lead to distraction. Some 47 percent of people say they have been distracted by billboards or outdoor advertising while driving.

"Being behind the wheel is not the time to multitask," says Mr Curtin. "But the 2008 AA Insurance Drivers Index shows that New Zealanders often do try to do other things while driving, such as talk or txt on a mobile, eat, apply make-up or change music. All of these actions reduce concentration on driving – and lack of concentration can and does lead to accidents."

AA Insurance recommends avoiding taking or making any calls while driving. For those drivers wanting to use their mobile phone more safely AA Insurance offers these tips:

1. If you want to take or make a call, pull over carefully into a safe area. Don't stop where you would be a hazard to other vehicles, pedestrians or yourself.
2. Don't use a hand-held mobile while driving. Use a hands free, in-car kit or portable hands-free device. When using this kind of device make sure it's operating before you start to drive. A hands-free mobile device can reduce the

physical effort to take and receive calls – however, it alone won't make it safe to use a mobile phone while driving.

3. Don't read or send txt messages, take notes or look up phone numbers while driving. Always keep both eyes on the road. If you need to you can use a directory assistance service that connects you directly to the number.
4. Use your phone's features to reduce the effort of making a call while using a hands-free set. Carefully read you phone's instructions manual and learn to use the speed dial and redial functions. If you can, use a phone with voice-activated dialling and automated answering features to reduce the effort to make or receive a call.
5. Tell the person you're talking to that you're driving. This lets them know that you may not always respond immediately and reminds both of you that driving safely is your first priority.
6. When road conditions worsen, delay any calls. Don't accept or make calls if traffic, weather conditions or road conditions could make it unsafe to do so. Also, even if the traffic conditions are light, always let the person you are talking to know that you're driving and you may need to end the call if conditions change.

**ENDS**

### **About AA Insurance**

AA Insurance was launched in 1994 and is a joint venture between New Zealand Automobile Association and Suncorp-Metway Limited.

AA Insurance has over 300 staff servicing 130,000 plus customers and manages almost 300,000 policies. Over half of those policies cover motor insurance risks including cars, bikes, caravans, and motor homes, and the remainder are house and contents insurance.

AA Insurance Limited has an A+ (Strong) insurer financial strength rating given by Standard and Poor's (Australia) Pty Ltd on 17 May 2008. For further information visit [www.aainsurance.co.nz](http://www.aainsurance.co.nz)

### **About the 2008 AA Insurance Drivers Index**

The 2008 AA Insurance Drivers Index was conducted by the NZAA and is an independent internet survey of 2,573 drivers around New Zealand.

### **For more information please contact:**

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