

Passengers drive motorists to distraction says AA Insurance survey

Auckland – 8 April 2009 – The most frequent cause of driver distraction is not radios or CDs, or even GPS systems: it's the other people in the car, according to new survey from AA Insurance.

The 2009 AA Insurance Drivers Index surveyed 3,708 New Zealand drivers aged 18-65.¹ More than half the people surveyed (54 percent) said that they have become distracted by other passengers, including children, in the car.

"Gadgets and music are often blamed as dangerous distractions but it may be that the hazard is the one sitting next to you – or arguing in the back seat!" says Martin Fox, Deputy General Manager, AA Insurance. "Drivers need to manage the distraction wherever it comes from, and it's easy to underestimate how distracting passengers can be."

"It's time we encouraged people to be more aware of the role they can play in reducing accidents by being responsible passengers."

Mobile phones are still the major driver distraction with 38 percent of people saying they often use their mobile phone without a hands-free kit, and 22 percent often send a text message while driving.

"While passengers may be a more frequent distraction, other research and our claims records suggest that cell phones are a more severe distraction for drivers."

"Really, if you're driving, it should be the only thing you're doing."

Further, 70 percent of those surveyed said they had been the driver at the time of a crash, and 38 percent of these said that driver inattention to the road contributed to the cause. In comparison, 12.8 percent said speeding was a contributing factor, followed by fatigue or tiredness (5.7 percent) or alcohol (5.6 percent).

However, passengers and mobile phones aren't the only cause of distraction to New Zealand drivers according to the survey. Some 50 percent of people say they've become distracted from

¹ Survey results are from the 2009 AA Insurance Drivers Index (an independent internet survey of 3,708 drivers aged 18 to 65 from around New Zealand). The survey results represent individual opinions and may differ from other research results.

driving by the radio, CD or MP3 player. Eating behind the wheel is now widespread, with 54 percent of people saying they often eat while driving. Some distractions are outside the car, with 34 percent of people saying they have been distracted by billboards or outside advertising.

Personal grooming seems to be more frequently observed than personally performed. Only 8 percent say they've applied make-up while driving but 68 percent say they've often seen others applying make-up while driving.

GPS systems are growing in popularity for New Zealand drivers. As these devices are intended to remove the distraction of a driver having to read a map or navigate unknown roads, there's some irony that of those surveyed, 11 percent have been distracted from driving by their GPS.

The survey results show that distracted drivers are a major cause of accidents and insurance claims are backed by anecdotes from AA Insurance's claims department.

Other common causes of distraction which drivers report to the claims department are:

- Changing music
- Animals in the back seat
- Texting or smoking
- Reading maps or even books.

Some people also blame loud music for causing them to miss hearing horns or sirens.

Other claims recently received by AA Insurance include:

- A man was driving while arguing with his partner, who was in the front passenger seat. Distracted, he did not realise the car in front had stopped to turn right and rear-ended it.
- A woman was driving down a narrow street with cars parked on both sides. The friend in the passenger seat was talking to her and as she turned to face her friend, she hit one of the parked cars.
- A driver was texting while driving home and missed a bend in the road and hit a power pole. Repairs to the car totalled \$7,000 and repairs to the power pole cost another \$10,000.
- A driver failed to stop at a Give Way sign because she was talking on her mobile and crashed into another car.

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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.

In 2008, AA Insurance was a finalist in the unlimited/JRA Best Places to Work Survey in the medium-large workplace category, making it one of the top places to work in New Zealand.

AA Insurance Limited has an A+ (Strong) Insurer Financial Strength Rating given by Standard and Poor's (Australia) Pty Ltd on 8 January 2009. For further information visit www.aainsurance.co.nz.

About the 2009 AA Insurance Drivers Index

The 2009 AA Insurance Drivers Index was conducted by the New Zealand AA and is an independent internet survey of 3,708 drivers aged 18 to 65 from around New Zealand.

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