

# Avoid Being Driven To Distraction

(NAPSA)—A growing number of motorists—including those who use their phones, tend to children or eat while driving—are getting the message about the potential risks of driving while distracted.

Experts say the number of wireless phone subscribers in the United States has grown from five million in 1990 to more than 100 million today.

While cellular phones and other in-vehicle communication devices bring value, if they are not used responsibly they can add to the array of activities that can distract drivers.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), driver distractions—which include eating, talking and other actions—account for an estimated 25 percent of the 6.3 million vehicle crashes reported to police each year.

In 1997, NHTSA investigated whether a reported increase in cell phone use resulted in more car crashes. The group concluded there is a relationship between cell phone use and crashes, but could not say to what extent.

Recent reports of highway tragedies involving drivers using hand-held cell phones have heightened concerns and prompted legislators to take action. More than 100 bills have been introduced in 37 states aimed at cell phone use in moving vehicles and regulators are calling for more research.

In response to increased concerns, General Motors is sponsoring a three-year, \$10-million initiative called “SenseAble driving.” The program combines research, technology and education to get the message out to drivers that hands on the wheel, eyes on the road and mind on the drive is the foundation for safe driving.



**A new safety program is meant to put the brakes on distracted driving.**

The program is the latest in a series of steps GM has taken to encourage safe operation of its vehicles.

In 1996, for example, the car maker pioneered OnStar, an in-vehicle safety and security communications system that is fully embedded in the vehicle. The system uses a Global Positioning System satellite network and cellular technology to connect drivers to an OnStar advisor 24-hours-a-day with the push of just one button.

New GM services geared toward limiting driver distraction include Personal Calling—which allows subscribers to use speech recognition technology to place hands-free, voice-activated calls—and Virtual Advisor, a system that lets subscribers access personalized Internet-based information in a hands-free, voice-activated manner while they are on the road.

The company is partnering with the Michigan office of Secretary of State to distribute safe-driving information to the state's 6.9 million licensed drivers. Following a six-month pilot, the car maker hopes to roll out the Michigan model to additional states.

For more information, check out the “SenseAble driving” Web site at [www.senseabledriving.com](http://www.senseabledriving.com).

## SenseAble Driving Tips

### Keep your EYES on the road,

- If you use a cellular phone, try to use a hands-free model.
- Never take notes or look up a phone number while driving.
- Try to use memory dialing or directory assistance while making calls from the car.
- Don't use any phone in demanding traffic situations.
- Designate a front-seat passenger to serve as 'co-pilot' to avoid fumbling with maps or unfamiliar navigation systems.

### Keep your HANDS on the wheel,

- Program your favorite stations into the radio for easy access.
- Arrange tapes and CDs in an easy-to-reach spot.
- Wait until the vehicle is stopped before retrieving items that fall to the floor.
- Avoid tending to kids while driving. Pull into a parking lot or other safe area to deal with the problem.
- Keep pets in an appropriate carrier or cage.
- If you eat while driving, choose easy-to-handle items and make sure all drinks are secured in cup-holders.

### And your MIND on the drive!

- Teen drivers are especially vulnerable to distractions. Avoid letting them carry large numbers of passengers.
- Avoid becoming 'lost in thought' while driving.
- Avoid stressful conversations while driving, either on cell phones or with another passenger.

