

CHAIN OF RESPONSIBILITY – DRIVER DISTRACTION

What are the causes of driver inattention and distraction and how can you identify them?

There are several causes of driver inattention and distraction. Most involve drivers undertaking secondary tasks while driving. While the safety risks of inattention and distraction are the same, their causes are different.

DRIVER INATTENTION

This is caused when a driver is essentially daydreaming. The driver's concentration wanders from the driving task and can result in the driver being oblivious to what is happening around them. Driver inattention can also be an indication of driver fatigue and often precedes a fatigue event, such as a microsleep.

DRIVER DISTRACTION

This is caused by external stimulus, eg: reaching for an object, responding to a notification on a mobile device, searching for a radio station or reacting to spilling a drink.

It is important that all drivers are aware of the potential consequences if they become inattentive or distracted and what the common causes are.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS AND HAZARDS OF DRIVER DISTRACTION?

Hazards from driver inattention and distraction may include:

- taking your eyes off the road resulting in driving blindly.

- increased likelihood of crashing.
 - delayed reaction time.
- The potential safety risks resulting from these hazards may include:
- serious injury or death of drivers, road users and the public.
 - damage to equipment, the road and other infrastructure.

MEASURES A DRIVER CAN TAKE TO MINIMISE RISK INCLUDING:

Inattention

- be aware that you may become unconsciously inattentive or daydream while operating a heavy vehicle.
- use sensory triggers to regain focus on the road, eg: squeeze the steering wheel.
- practice mindfulness exercises to improve concentration.
- recognise inattention as a potential sign of fatigue.

Distraction

- do not use mobile devices when driving.
- if you must use your mobile device, use only handsfree operation such as a voice or vehicle manufacturers steering wheel control.
- use bluetooth or other technology options for mobile device connectivity.
- secure mobile devices to a mount while driving.
- place mobile phones on *do not disturb* before operating a heavy vehicle.

It is important that all drivers are aware of the potential consequences if they become inattentive or distracted.

- queue music, podcasts or select a radio station prior to undertaking the journey to ensure minimal interaction with devices while driving.
- do not use noise-cancelling headphones while operating a heavy vehicle. This can limit your ability to hear cabin alerts and emergency vehicles horns/alarms.
- avoid undertaking secondary tasks such as eating and smoking while operating a heavy vehicle.
- place items, such as water bottles, in an easy-to-reach and consistent spot in the cabin.
- use an analogue watch or place smart watches on *do not disturb* while operating a heavy vehicle.
- if you are travelling with a passenger, ask them to undertake secondary tasks for you, such as organising paperwork, navigating and using mobile devices. ●

Source: Regulatory Advice – Driver distraction | NHVR