Distracted Driving Creates Dangerous Situations

Murray Pendleton
Chairman, Connecticut Police Chief’s Association Highway Safety Committee

Driving large municipal trucks and special purpose vehicles, including cars, can be challenging enough even when full attention is given to the road and potential hazards. It only takes a second for a crash to happen. Distractions occur when drivers concentrate on something other than operating their vehicles—such as engaging in cell phone conversations. NHTSA (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration) estimates that 25% of all crashes involve some form of driver distractions.

National surveys show that most drivers at least occasionally engage in behaviors that draw some of their attention away from their driving task. The most common of these behaviors include such general activities as:

- Talking or texting on a cell phone;
- Talking with passengers;
- Changing radio stations or CD’s
- Eating or drinking while driving

Operating municipal trucks is unique. The fact that most of the trucks have special equipment requires more attention to detail, leaving no room for distractions.

see Distracted on page 2
Driving is a full-time job, and operating snowplows, trash pick-up trucks, fire engines, etc. while using a cell phone, reading a road map, or talking to fellow employees is potentially dangerous.

- Make adjustments to vehicle controls such as radios, air conditioning, or mirrors before beginning to drive or after the vehicle is no longer in motion;
- Don’t reach down or behind the driver’s seat, pick up items from the floor, open the glove compartment, clean the inside windows, or perform personal grooming while driving;
- You should not eat or drink while driving, but if you do, get something that is not messy and that you can hold in one hand. Set your food up next to you before you take off and make sure you use a cup holder for your drink.
- Know where you are going and how to get there before you start out.

For more than 10 years studies have been conducted which focus on the risks associated with various types of distractions. There clearly is ample information to believe a distracted driver is at an increased risk of a crash.

Your complete attention to driving is not only in the best interest of you and your passengers but can clearly save lives as well as reduce serious injuries.

**TEXTING IS A MAJOR DISTRACTER**

The National Safety Council estimates that 80% of Americans admit to using cell phones, and 20% admit to texting, while driving. That amounts to about 100 million drivers.

Driving while using a cell phone incurs a 4 times greater risk of crashing, which is equivalent to driving while drunk (with a 0.08 blood-alcohol level.) For texters, the risk is eight times greater.

Talking on a cell phone while driving slows down the reaction time of even the most experienced driver.

All drivers of municipal vehicles must be committed to reducing serious injuries and deaths on our roadways.

**THIS ALL STARTS WITH YOUR COMMITMENT TO NOT BECOME A DISTRACTED DRIVER.**

**A LIST OF COMMON DISTRACTERS:**

- Use of cell phones
- Eating/drinking/smoking
- Texting and e-mailing
- Personal hygiene
- Changing radio stations/CD’s/DVD’s, Sight Seeing/gawking
- iPods
- In-car information screens
- Adjusting mirrors/heat/AC
- Searching for items
- GPS
- Unsecured objects
- Reading maps/directions/books/magazines/newspapers

Such distractions may not only cause you to lose control of your vehicle, they may cost someone, including you….your life.
New England APWA Chapter Update

Planning for the August 14th thru 18th APWA Congress and Equipment Show has reached its peak as the Chapter prepares to host the many Public Works practitioners that will come to Boston in mid-August to both participate in the Congress and enjoy the wonderful City of Boston. Volunteers for helping to run the Congress and its many meetings will be recruited off the Chapter’s web page beginning in March. Please go to http://newengland.apwa.net and click on the Congress Volunteer sign-up section to reserve your time slot.

Despite the Congress planning effort, the New England Chapter will still be conducting its Spring Meeting here in CT on April 14th, its Spring Mechanics Workshop on April 8th (in Natick, MA), a one-day workshop on Effective Utility Management on April 20th (Co-sponsored by the EPA), and its Western Regional Meeting on May 5th, most likely in Sturbridge. Check the Chapter’s web site (at the above URL) for meeting details, times and locations.

The 2010 National Public Works Week Luncheon will be held in Foxborough, MA (right next to Patriot Place) this spring on May 19th. This event attracts over 400 public works officials every year … and this year you can combine the trip with a visit to the new Patriot Place—right next to Gillette Stadium.

More information on all New England Chapter events is available from any of the Connecticut Directors:

WALT VESELKA (Bristol)
walterveselka@ci.bristol.ct.us

PETE LOZIS (New Haven)
plozis@newhavenct.net

GORDON DARING (VHB-Middletown)
gdaring@vhb.com

BILL MURPHY (AI Engineers-Middletown)
wmurphy@aiengineers.com

SECRETARY TREASURER LON HULTGREN
(Mansfield)
HultgrenLR@MansfieldCT.org

Public Works Week
May 16-22, 2010

National Public Works Week (NPWW) is a celebration of the tens of thousands of men and women in North America who provide and maintain the infrastructure and services collectively known as public works.

Instituted as a public education campaign by the American Public Works Association (APWA) in 1960, NPWW calls attention to the importance of public works in community life. The Week seeks to enhance the prestige of the often—unsung heroes of our society—the professionals who serve the public good every day with quiet dedication.

APWA encourages public works agencies and professionals to take the opportunity to make their stories known in their communities.

For more information about Public Works Week, please visit the American Public Works Association at:

www.apwa.net/About/NPWW/

Work Zone Safety Awareness Week
April 19-23, 2010

For more information visit:
www.workzonesafety.org/

Work Zone Safety Guidebooks

The T2 Center has received a new shipment of the Work Zone Safety Field Guidebooks.

Please order your free copies by contacting Vivian Castelli at (860) 486-5400 or via e-mail at: vivianc@engr.uconn.edu
The Town of Wethersfield topdresses their recreation fields with compost.

Green Up Time
Spring is just around the corner! And with the season comes the “greening” of turf as towns prepare for the many different team sports held on municipal recreation fields.

Traditionally “greening up” refers to applications of conventional fertilizers that produce a rapid color change of turf from dull brown to bright green. But is there a “greener” way to manage playing fields? A number of Connecticut municipalities have said “yes.” They are greening their fields with organic techniques, avoiding toxic chemicals like pesticides, and relying on non-petroleum sources of nutrients, like leaf compost.

The Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) has been providing towns with information and assistance on greening turf through organic land care (OLC) techniques. OLC is a whole system approach that relies on reinvigorating soil health so that turf can be managed without conventional fertilizers and pesticides. DEP’s goal is to help municipalities maintain quality turf while complying with the pesticide prohibition on K-8 school grounds now scheduled to go into effect in July 2010. DEP’s Office of Pollution Prevention began its efforts in 2006, distributing over 1,000 copies of its “Organic Land Care” video to towns and individuals. From 2007 through 2009, DEP partnered with the Connecticut Northeast Organic Farming Association (CT NOFA) to conduct pilot projects with the towns of Manchester and Watertown, documenting the transition from conventional to organic turf management. Manchester was successful at implementing the organic approach due to its ability to purchase organic fertilizers and compost teas and apply quality compost made at the town landfill. The town stopped using conventional pesticides on the soccer field during the three-year pilot project and reduced the use on the adjacent two fields. Watertown eliminated the use of pesticides on Deland Field, a five-acre field with three baseball diamonds during its two-year pilot project. Last year, three workshops on organic land care were cosponsored with the University of Connecticut Plant Science Department and CT NOFA. Over 30 officials from 21 towns attended along with 15 private landscapers. Workshop participants received a free soil test of a municipal field and were educated about soil testing and how to interpret the results. The attendees learned how to develop a practical organic land care plan within the town’s budget and took a field trip to Wethersfield’s compost facility for a demonstration on compost screening and topdressing. A follow-up survey indicated that the participants’ knowledge of compost improved as a result of the workshops and that they will use a number of OLC practices at their municipal fields.

For more information about OLC or to watch the video at www.ct.gov/dep/p2, go to “Organic Land Care Municipalities”.

Reprinted from P2 View, a newsletter published by the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection’s Office of Pollution Prevention. For a free subscription, contact Judy Prill at judith.prill@ct.gov or (860) 424-3694.
Adequately maintained traffic signs and pavement markings help improve highway safety, especially during the nighttime. The retroreflective properties of traffic signs bounce light from vehicle headlights back toward the vehicle and the driver’s eyes, making the signs appear brighter and easier to see and read at night. Because the retroreflective properties of traffic control devices deteriorate over time, agencies need to manage the maintenance of their signs and pavement markings. Recent retroreflectivity standards are set forth in the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) and compliance dates are coming up soon. Did you know that by January of 2012, all agencies must implement a sign maintenance program that addresses the nighttime visibility of their signs? [If not, see the cover story of the Connecticut Technology Transfer Newsletter, Spring, 2008 issue, at www.T2center.uconn.edu]

The Connecticut Technology Transfer Center has a new resource to assist small and medium sized agencies without traffic engineering staff to meet the new federal requirements for maintaining traffic sign retroreflectivity. The Sign Retroreflectivity Toolkit, produced by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), contains a hard copy guidebook (shown at right) and a stand-alone computer-based package on a CD that contains a great deal of information, resources, and automated features. A copy of this new toolkit was sent by the T2 Center to each City and Town in Connecticut in January of 2010.

These tools offer a simple step-by-step approach to retroreflectivity compliance, suggested options for inspection procedures, and a budget estimating tool. These items are designed to assist agencies in making informed decisions before implementing a retroreflectivity maintenance program while considering resource limitations.

Article adapted with permission from the KS LTAP Newsletter, Fall, 2009, a newsletter of the Kansas Local Technical Assistance Program (LTAP).

These resources are especially useful for agencies that do not have traffic engineering staff.
Safety Performance Measure Primer
A Tool for Integrating Safety in the Planning Process

To promote a safer transportation system, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has produced “A Primer on Safety Performance Measures for the Transportation Planning Process” to help State and local practitioners, transportation planners, and decision-makers identify, select, and use safety performance measures as a part of the transportation planning process. Benefits safety performance measures provide to the planning and decision-making process include: greater accountability, greater linkage between safety goals/objectives and policy formulation; better understanding of the impacts of alternative courses of action; improved communication about transportation safety; increased organizational focus on safety priorities; and information feedback.

The Primer draws from current literature, professional experience, and State department of transportation (DOT) and metropolitan planning organization (MPO) practices. Key elements of the Primer include: a definition of performance measures; a step-by-step description with flowcharts showing how safety performance measures can be identified and integrated into the transportation planning process; characteristics of effective performance measures; a checklist to assess an organization’s current status with respect to the use of safety performance measures in the transportation planning and decision-making process; and a list of references.

The document also includes seven case studies from States and MPOs highlighting the use of safety performance measures to enhance the planning processes. For example, the Minnesota DOT’s (MnDOT) performance-based investment plan enables the State to estimate the investments needed to meet established performance measure targets for traveler safety. MnDOT has created a vertically integrated structure ensuring policies made at headquarters are implemented in the districts. Safety performance measures that align with statewide goals are also used by the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) to set investment levels. SEMCOG uses a comprehensive regional approach to identify and prioritize projects and provides crash data to local agencies for high-risk location analysis and cost-benefit analysis. This approach ensures local safety analysis and project prioritization is aligned with the region’s and State’s long-range goals, objectives, and performance measures.

The Primer will be available electronically and hard copies will be available through FHWA early in 2010. Electronic copies will be available on both the FHWA Office of Safety website (safety.fhwa.dot.gov) and the Transportation Safety Planning website (www.tsp.trb.org).

Earth Day Turns 40!

Since the first Earth Day in 1970, Connecticut has made great progress in cleaning up our air and water, preserving open space and initiating state-wide programs like recycling and pollution prevention. The 40th Anniversary of Earth Day provides an opportunity to focus our attention on our environmental successes and the challenges we still face.

Working in cooperation with a coalition of environmental advocacy groups, The Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection is planning to celebrate this milestone in a special way. Details of the Earth Day “agenda” are still being developed, but you can expect to see events at the State Capitol, outreach to schools, outdoor activities and more. DEP will soon launch a special “Earth Day” feature on its web site, providing information so that you can join in the celebration.

www.ct.gov/dep/earthday
Elected officials are viewed by the public as “people of action.” On a daily basis, elected officials are forced to make numerous decisions that have significant impact on the community they represent. The public expects a skilled elected official to collect information, weigh the consequences, and make the best decision for their community. Because of the broad nature of decisions that elected officials face, they frequently find themselves working in areas outside their “comfort zone.”

Traffic safety is one of those areas. There are even aspects of traffic safety that encourage a false sense of security for elected officials, such as:

• COUNTER-INTUITIVE NATURE: Many traffic safety decisions are counter-intuitive. For example, installing a stop sign to control vehicle speed can actually increase vehicle speeds as drivers accelerate to “make up” lost time.

• ROADS VIEWED AS “COMMONPLACE”: The public has come to view roads as an ordinary, simple feature of the landscape. This desensitization to the subtle design features of a road and the complex relationships that exist within roadway infrastructure lead to the belief that good, safe roads are “simple.” When it comes to road safety, it’s anything but simple.

For further information on factors that may contribute to the number of crashes on local roads and factors that influence the number of crashes on all roads, review our new Connecticut T2 Center Tech Brief titled “Traffic Safety Primer for Local Elected Officials” at www.t2center.uconn.edu.

Article adapted with permission from the KS LTAP Newsletter, Fall, 2009, a newsletter of the Kansas Local Technical Assistance Program.

Controlling Speeds

SPEED LIMITS: Research has shown that drivers typically drive a speed that “feels” safe. Speed limits outside of residential areas are based on the 85th percentile speed—the speed that 85 percent of drivers do not exceed. Research has shown the 85th percentile speed to be near the optimum speed for safety. Traffic safety studies have also shown that driving too slow with respect to the average speed can put drivers at the same risk as driving too fast.

STOP SIGNS ARE NOT FOR SPEED CONTROL: Stop signs should not be used for speed control. Over 20 research studies have concluded that stop signs are not effective for speed control and in many cases increase the speeds between the signs.

TRAFFIC CALMING: Traffic calming techniques can be utilized to reduce speeds and mitigate some of the negative aspects of motor vehicle use on the pedestrian and bicycle users. Traffic calming techniques typically revolve around making physical improvements to transportation facilities or rely on education to change driver behaviors.
Technology Transfer Center Request Form

_____ Please change my address/contact information as indicated below.

_____ Please add this person to the mailing list. _____ Please remove this person

Name: ______________________________________________________________

Title: ________________________________________________________________

Agency/Organization: __________________________________________________

Address: ____________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

City/State/Zip: ________________________________________________________

Phone: ___________________ Fax: _________________ E-Mail: ________________

I would like to see a future newsletter article on the topic of: __________________

I would like to suggest the following future training topics be offered by the T2 Center:
____________________________________________________________________

I would like to request the following informational resource materials:
____________________________________________________________________

Please fax a copy of this form to (860) 486-2399 or mail to:

University of Connecticut
Technology Transfer Center
270 Middle Turnpike, Unit 5202
Storrs, CT 06269-5202