

ITSMR Research Note

KEY FINDINGS

Crash Analyses

- Less than 1% of police-reported fatal and personal injury (F & PI) crashes involved the use of a cell phone over the five years, 2011-2015.
- 12 persons were killed and 2,784 persons were injured in cell phone crashes over the five years, 2011- 2015.
- 21%-22% of police-reported F&PI crashes had “driver inattention/distraction” reported as a contributing factor each year.
- 160 persons were killed and more than 33,000 persons were injured in crashes in 2015 that had “driver inattention/distraction” reported as a contributing factor.

Ticket Analyses

- 1.2 million tickets were issued for cell phone violations during the five-year period 2011-2015.
- 217,021 tickets were issued for cell phone violations in 2015, down 16% from 2011; 39% of the tickets in 2015 were for texting.
- 59% of the cell phone tickets were issued in New York City, followed by Upstate (33%), and Long Island (8%).
- 67% of the tickets were issued to men; 51% of the tickets were issued to drivers ages 21-39.

Driver Behavior Survey

- 58% of the drivers surveyed in 2016 said they talk on a cell phone while driving, down from 63% in 2013.
- 48%-52% of the drivers surveyed each year, 2013-2016, reported that they send or receive text messages while driving; 8%-9% reported that they text “always” or “most of the time” while driving.
- 96% thought that texting while driving impairs a driver’s ability to drive safely “a great deal” (83%) or “somewhat” (13%).

CONCLUSIONS

- Cell phone use continues to be a relatively minor factor in crashes.
- Distracted driving continues to be a factor in one out of five F&PI crashes.
- Based on self-reported behavior, talking on a cell phone while driving is declining, while texting has remained fairly constant over the four years 2013-2016.

Crashes Involving Cell Phone Use and Distracted Driving

ABSTRACT

The Institute for Traffic Safety Management and Research (ITSMR) recently completed a multi-method study on the effects of cell phone use, texting and other driver distractions on highway safety. The study involved 1) analyses of crashes in which cell phones and other driver distractions were a factor, 2) analyses of traffic tickets issued to drivers for non-compliance with New York’s cell phone and texting laws, and 3) a driver behavior survey. Earlier research efforts concluded that although cell phone use while driving was continuing to increase, it was a relatively minor factor in crashes and that distracted driving was consistently reported as a contributory factor in one out of five crashes. The purpose of this 2016 study was to determine the current status of cell phone use and texting among drivers, the extent to which distracted driving is cited as a factor in crashes, the level of enforcement of the law and public perceptions. Key findings from the study are noted in the box on the left.

INTRODUCTION

Cell phone use, texting and other driver distractions remain a serious traffic safety issue. According to the Annual Wireless Industry Survey conducted by CTIA – The Wireless Association, as of December 2015, there were 378 million wireless subscribers in the U.S., representing more than one cell phone per person for the nation’s 2015 total population of 321 million.¹ The survey also found that 1.9 trillion text messages and 219 billion multimedia messages were sent or received by U.S. consumers in 2015.

Recognizing the safety concerns associated with the use of a cell phone while driving, New York became the first state in the nation to prohibit the use of hand-held cell phones while driving. The law was effective November 1, 2001. New York enacted further legislation that prohibited text messaging for all drivers, effective November 1, 2009. As of September 2016, 14 states plus the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Virgin Islands have also enacted primary enforcement laws banning the use of hand-held cell phones while driving. Twenty states plus the District of Columbia have also enacted legislation that bans school bus drivers from using a cell phone while driving and 38 states plus the District of Columbia have passed legislation that bans novice drivers from using a cell phone while driving. In addition, a total of 46 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam and the Virgin Islands have banned text messaging for all drivers and an additional two states have banned novice drivers from texting.²

In 2012, at the request of the NYS Department of Motor Vehicles, the Institute for Traffic Safety Management and Research (ITSMR) conducted a study that examined the effects of cell phone use and other driver distractions on highway safety. The study included four major components: 1) observational surveys of drivers on New York’s roadways, 2) an analysis of motor vehicle crashes in which the use of a cell phone or some other form of distracted driving was identified as a contributory factor, 3) an analysis of traffic tickets issued to drivers for non-compliance with the cell phone law, and 4) a survey of driver behavior with respect to cell phone use. The study report was published in September 2012 and is available on the ITSMR website (www.itsmr.org).

This *Research Note* updates three primary components of the 2012 study: analyses of crash and ticket data and a survey of driver behavior with respect to cell phone use. The objectives of these analyses were to determine the current involvement of cell phones and other distracted driving behaviors in motor vehicle crashes and whether changes have occurred in recent years.

ANALYSES OF POLICE-REPORTED CRASHES INVOLVING DISTRACTED DRIVING

The data source for the crash data used in the study was the NYS Department of Motor Vehicles’ Accident Information System (AIS). The study involved two primary components: 1) analyses of police-reported fatal and personal injury (F&PI) cell phone and distracted driving crashes that occurred during the five years, 2011-2015, and 2) analyses of the characteristics associated with the drivers involved in those crashes.

The study defines a cell phone crash as a crash that meets at least one of the following criteria:

- 1) Contributing factor of “Cell Phone (hand held)”, “Cell Phone (hands free)” and/or “Texting” was reported on the police accident report form.
- 2) Ticket was issued for a violation of VTL 1225-c (talking on a hand-held cell phone while driving) and/or VTL 1225-d (texting using a cell phone while driving).

The study defines a crash as being a distracted driving crash if the contributing factor of “Driver Inattention/ Distraction” was reported on the police accident report form.

FATAL AND PERSONAL INJURY CRASHES

Crashes Involving the Use of a Cell Phone

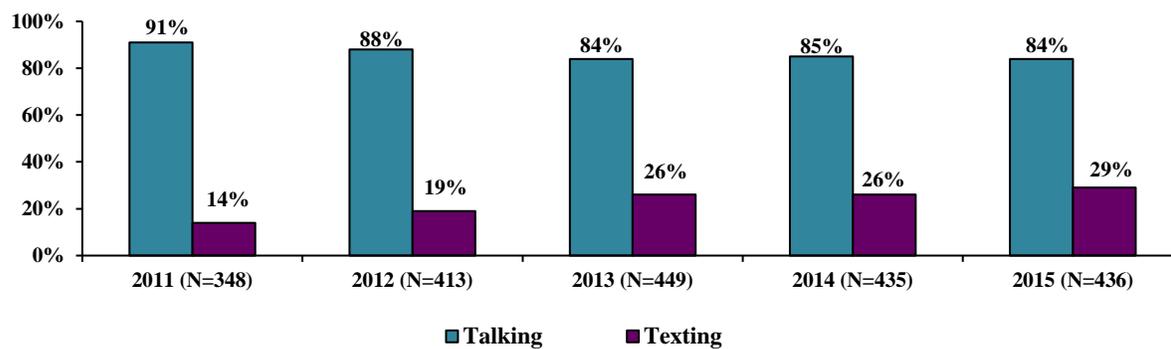
The results of the crash analyses indicate that cell phone use continues to be reported in only a small number of crashes. As shown in Table 1, there were 12 fatal and 2,069 personal injury cell phone crashes during the five-year period, 2011-2015, representing 0.4% of the total number of fatal and personal injury crashes.

Table 1
NYS Police-Reported Fatal and Personal Injury Crashes

	2011		2012		2013		2014		2015		2011-2015	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Fatal Crashes	1,077		1,082		1,109		966		1,045		5,279	
Cell Phone Use	1	0.1	2	0.2	5	0.4	3	0.3	1	0.1	12	0.2
Distracted Driving	125	11.6	148	13.7	127	11.4	100	10.4	150	14.4	650	12.3
PI Crashes	116,575		112,918		114,592		108,862		102,986		555,933	
Cell Phone Use	347	0.3	411	0.4	444	0.4	432	0.4	435	0.4	2,069	0.4
Distracted Driving	25,040	21.5	24,304	21.5	25,098	21.9	24,201	22.2	23,060	22.4	121,703	21.9
Total F&PI Crashes	117,652		114,000		115,701		109,828		104,031		561,212	
Cell Phone Use	348	0.3	413	0.4	449	0.4	435	0.4	436	0.4	2,081	0.4
Distracted Driving	25,165	21.4	24,452	21.4	25,225	21.8	24,301	22.1	23,210	22.3	122,353	21.8

Additional analyses were conducted to examine the number of cell phone crashes that involved talking on a cell phone and the number that involved texting. It is important to note that a single crash can involve both talking on a cell phone and texting; as a result, the annual percentages seen in Figure 1 total more than 100%. As shown in Figure 1, over the five-year period, 2011-2015, the proportion of F&PI cell phone crashes that involved talking on a cell phone dropped from 91% in 2011 to 84% in 2013 where it remained relatively unchanged in 2014 and 2015. In contrast, texting is on a steady upward trend, with texting involved in 29% of the F&PI cell phone crashes in 2015, more than double the 14% of crashes in 2011.

Figure 1
Type of Cell Phone Use in Fatal and Personal Injury Crashes



Crashes Involving Distracted Driving

In each of the five years, 2011-2015, “driver inattention/distraction” was reported as a contributing factor in approximately one out of five fatal and personal injury crashes (Table 1). While driver inattention/distraction was reported as a factor in 10%-14% of the fatal crashes each year, the proportion of personal injury crashes that identified driver inattention/distraction as a contributing factor remained constant at 21%-22% over the five years.

FATALITIES AND PERSONS INJURED IN CELL PHONE AND DISTRACTED DRIVING CRASHES

During the five years, 2011-2015, 12 persons were killed and 2,784 persons were injured in cell phone crashes (Table 2). In the same five-year period, the number of persons killed in distracted driving crashes fluctuated each year, with 160 fatalities occurring in 2015, up from 100 in 2014. The number of persons injured in distracted driving crashes fluctuated between approximately 33,000 and 35,000 each year.

Table 2
Fatalities and Persons Injured in Cell Phone and Distracted Driving Crashes

	2011		2012		2013		2014		2015		2011-2015	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Fatalities	1,153		1,163		1,188		1,026		1,116		5,646	
In Cell Phone Crashes	1	0.1	2	0.2	5	0.3	3	0.3	1	0.1	12	0.2
In Distracted Driving Crashes	130	11.3	160	13.8	128	10.8	100	9.7	160	14.3	678	12.0
Persons Injured	177,445		169,206		169,177		160,497		159,025		835,350	
In Cell Phone Crashes	462	0.3	552	0.3	601	0.4	599	0.4	570	0.4	2,784	0.3
In Distracted Driving Crashes	35,151	19.8	33,785	20.0	34,365	20.3	33,272	20.7	33,121	20.8	169,694	20.3

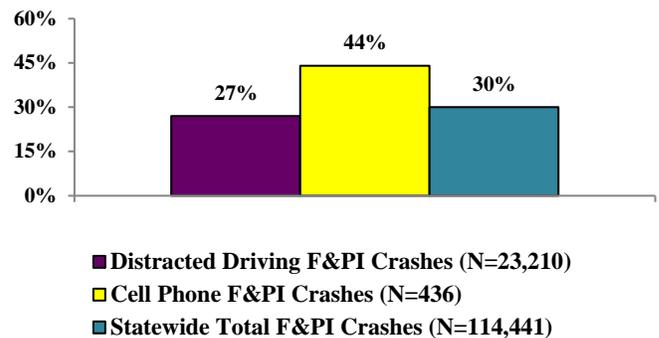
CRASH CHARACTERISTICS

A series of analyses were conducted to examine various characteristics associated with cell phone and distracted driving crashes. The variables examined included: single vehicle involvement, crash location (i.e., region of the state), day of week and time of day. Because the analyses of the data for these variables for the five years, 2011-2015, showed little variation among the years, only the data for 2015 are presented below.

Single Vehicle Involvement

Cell phone F&PI crashes were much more likely than either distracted driving F&PI crashes or all F&PI crashes to involve a single vehicle. As indicated in Figure 2, in 2015, 44% of the cell phone F&PI crashes involved a single vehicle, compared to 27% of the distracted driving F&PI crashes and 30% of all F&PI crashes.

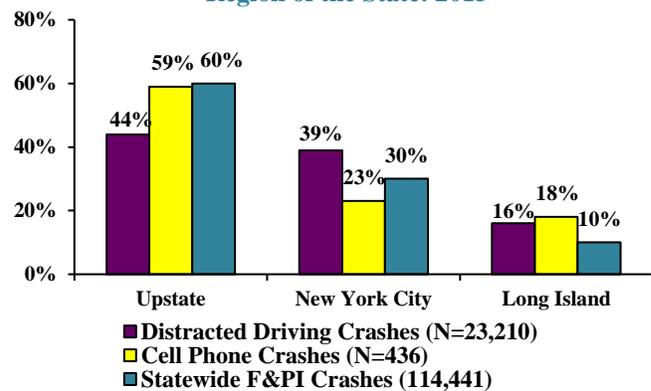
Figure 2
NYS Police-Reported Fatal and Personal Injury Crashes
Single Vehicle Involvement: 2015



Region of the State

For analysis purposes, the state is typically divided into three regions: Upstate, Long Island and New York City. The Upstate region consists of the 55 counties north of New York City; the Long Island region includes the two counties of Nassau and Suffolk and the New York City region is comprised of five counties (Bronx, Kings, New York, Queens and Richmond). As indicated in Figure 3, the largest proportions of distracted driving crashes, cell phone crashes and all F&PI crashes occurred Upstate in 2015 (44%, 59% and 60%, respectively), followed by crashes in New York City and on Long Island.

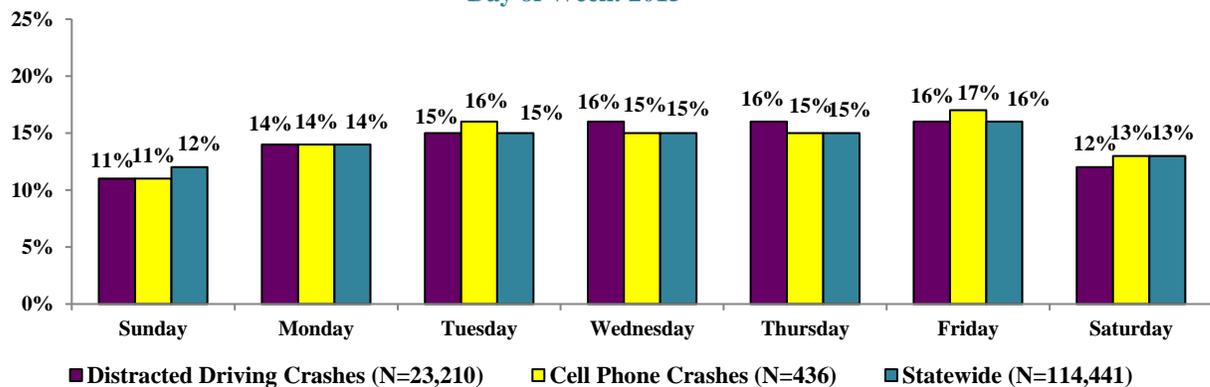
Figure 3
NYS Police-Reported Fatal and Personal Injury Crashes
Region of the State: 2015



Day of Week

The distribution of both cell phone and distracted driving F&PI crashes by day of week was very similar to the distribution of all F&PI crashes in 2015 (Figure 4). As shown in Figure 4, cell phone and distracted driving crashes are fairly evenly distributed over the weekdays (14%-17%); approximately one-quarter of the crashes occurred on weekends.

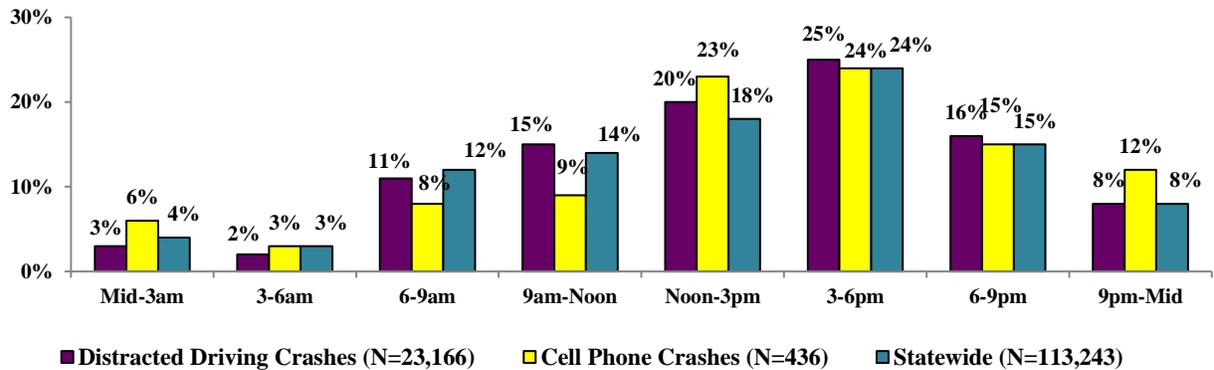
Figure 4
NYS Police-Reported Fatal and Personal Injury Crashes
Day of Week: 2015



Time of Day

As indicated in Figure 5, the distribution of distracted driving F&PI crashes by time of day was very similar to the distribution of all F&PI crashes in 2015, while the distribution of cell phone F&PI crashes showed some differences. Cell phone crashes were more likely to occur between 9pm and 3am, compared to either distracted driving crashes or all F&PI crashes (18% vs. 11% and 12%, respectively). The largest proportion of both cell phone and distracted driving crashes (25% and 24%, respectively) occurred between 3pm and 6pm.

Figure 5
NYS Police-Reported Fatal and Personal Injury Crashes
Time of Day: 2015



DRIVER CHARACTERISTICS

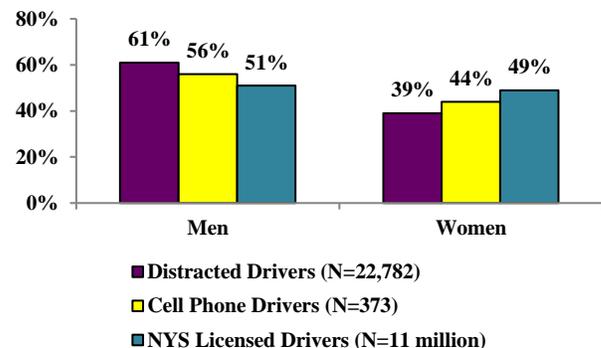
Analyses were also conducted comparing the characteristics of cell phone drivers and distracted drivers with the characteristics of all New York State licensed drivers for the five years, 2011-2015. It is important to note that these analyses did not include all drivers, but rather focused on those drivers for whom contributing factors of “Cell Phone (hand held)”, “Cell Phone (hands free)”, “Texting” and “Driver Inattention/Distraction” were reported on the police accident report forms. The analyses also included those drivers who were issued a ticket for a cell phone and/or a texting violation. Since only small variations or fluctuations occurred from year to year with regard to the age and gender of the driver, only the results for 2015 are presented.

Driver Gender

As Figure 6 shows, analyses of the data on distracted drivers showed that men were overrepresented; 51% of the licensed drivers were men, but men accounted for 61% of the distracted drivers in F&PI crashes in 2015.

The distribution of cell phone drivers by gender was also somewhat different than that of all licensed drivers. Figure 6 shows that 56% of the cell phone drivers were men and 44% were women, compared to 51% and 49% of the licensed drivers, respectively.

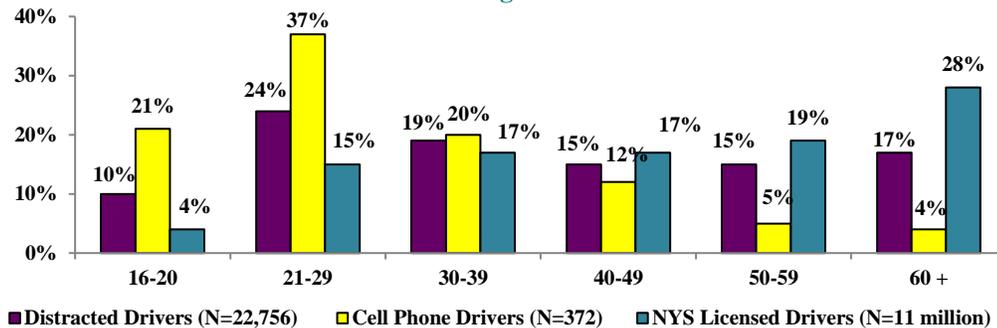
Figure 6
NYS Police-Reported Fatal and Personal Injury Crashes
Driver Gender: 2015



Driver Age

For the analyses by age, the population of drivers was divided into six categories: 16-20 years; 21-29 years; 30-39 years; 40-49 years; 50-59 years; and 60 years and over. Young drivers (ages 16-20) were overrepresented in both distracted driving and cell phone F&PI crashes (Figure 7). Four percent of New York State's licensed drivers were under age 21 in 2015, compared to 10% of the distracted drivers and 21% of the cell phone drivers. In addition, while drivers ages 21-29 represent 15% of the state's licensed drivers, they accounted for 24% of the distracted drivers involved in F&PI crashes and 37% of the cell phone drivers in 2015.

Figure 7
NYS Police-Reported Fatal and Personal Injury Crashes
Driver Age: 2015



ANALYSES OF TICKETS ISSUED FOR VIOLATIONS OF THE CELL PHONE LAWS

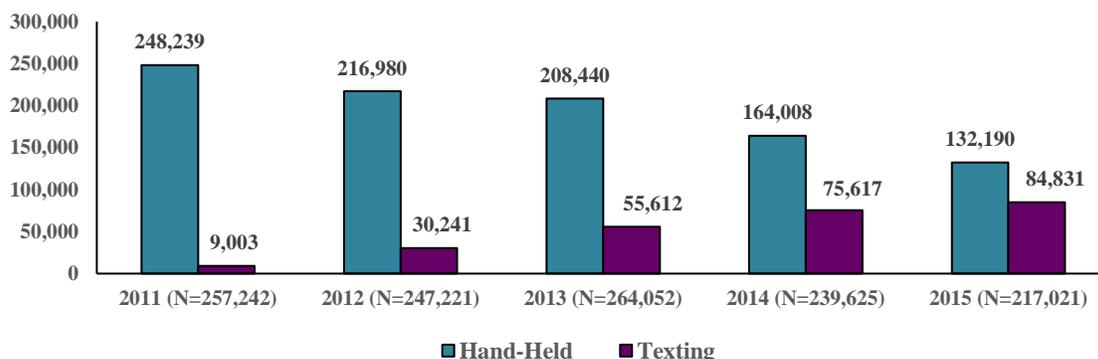
New York's cell phone law banning the use of hand-held cellular phones while driving carries a penalty of a fine of up to \$100 for a violation of the law. The law prohibiting text messaging provides for two driver penalty points and a fine of up to \$150. To determine the extent to which the hand-held cell phone and text messaging laws are being enforced and provide information on drivers violating the laws, data on tickets issued to drivers for violations of the hand-held cell phone and texting laws were examined for the five years, 2011-2015.

Ticket data for the analyses were obtained from the NYS Department of Motor Vehicles' Traffic Safety Law Enforcement and Disposition (TSLED) and Administrative Adjudication (AA) systems. Currently, TSLED captures data on tickets issued in all areas of the state except for New York City; TSLED also excludes tickets issued in the city of Rochester, except for tickets issued in violation of VTL Section 1192 (operating a motor vehicle while under the influence of alcohol or drugs). The areas not covered under TSLED are covered by the AA system. Key results from these analyses are presented below.

RESULTS OF TICKET ANALYSES

More than 1.2 million tickets were issued for violating the hand-held cell phone and text messaging laws during the five-year period 2011-2015. The proportion of cell phone tickets issued for texting increased from less than 4% in 2011 (9,003 of the 257,242 tickets issued) to 39% in 2015 (84,831 of 217,021 tickets issued). As shown in Figure 8, the number of tickets issued statewide for non-compliance with the hand-held cell phone and text messaging laws dropped from 257,242 in 2011 to 217,021 in 2015, representing a decrease of 16%. While the total number of tickets issued for all traffic violations declined during this same time period, cell phone and texting tickets experienced a much greater decrease (16% compared to 4% for all tickets). Cell phone tickets (including both hand-held and texting violations) as a proportion of the total traffic tickets remained constant at 7% in each of the four years, 2011-2014, then dropped to 6% in 2015.

Figure 8
Tickets Issued for Non-Compliance with the Cell Phone Laws



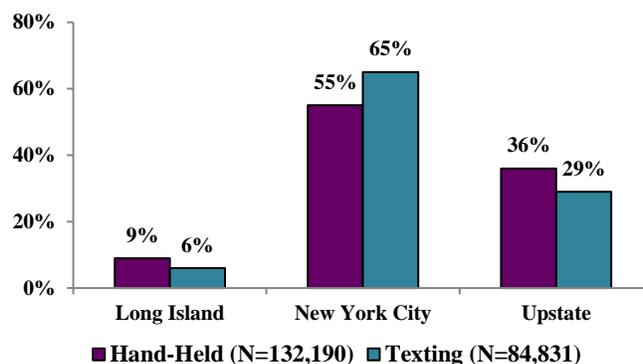
Although the distribution of total tickets issued by region (Upstate, New York City and Long Island) showed little variation between 2011 and 2015, the distribution of cell phone tickets by region changed. As shown in Table 3, the largest proportion of all tickets issued in 2011 and 2015 were issued Upstate (55%), followed by New York City (30%) and Long Island (15%). In contrast, the largest proportion of cell phone tickets issued were issued in New York City, followed by Upstate and Long Island. Table 3 further shows that the proportion of cell phone tickets issued in New York City decreased from 64% in 2011 to 59% in 2015, while increasing from 29% to 33% Upstate.

Table 3 Tickets Issued for Non-Compliance with the Cell Phone Laws by Region				
	Total Tickets		Cell Phone Tickets	
	2011 (N=3,663,118)	2015 (N=3,509,818)	2011 (N=257,242)	2015 (N=217,021)
Long Island	14.8%	15.2%	7.9%	8.2%
New York City	30.0%	30.0%	63.5%	58.5%
Upstate	55.2%	54.8%	28.6%	33.2%

As indicated previously, in 2015, approximately 61% of the cell phone tickets issued were for using a hand-held cell phone and 39% were issued for texting while driving. When the text messaging violations are analyzed separately from the hand-held cell phone tickets issued, a different regional pattern emerges.

As Figure 9 shows, 65% of the text messaging tickets in 2015 were issued in New York City and 29% were issued Upstate, compared to 55% and 36%, respectively, of the hand-held cell phone tickets issued.

Figure 9
Tickets Issued for Non-Compliance with the Cell Phone Laws
Hand-Held vs. Text Messaging Violations
Region: 2015



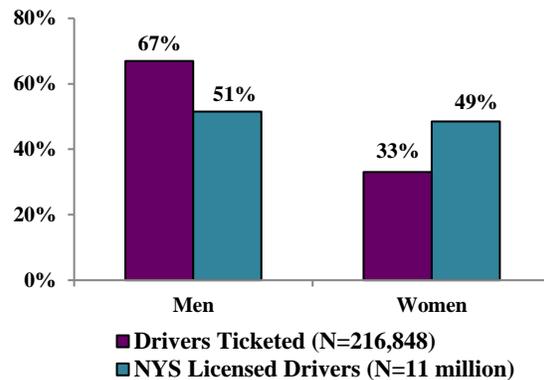
DRIVER CHARACTERISTICS

The data by driver gender and age for each of the five years, 2011–2015, were analyzed to determine whether the gender and age distribution of drivers ticketed for non-compliance of the cell phone laws was similar to that of all New York State licensed drivers. Since only small variations or fluctuations occurred from year to year with regard to the age and gender of the driver, only the results for 2015 are presented. It is important to note that a driver can be issued multiple tickets for cell phone violations in a single event (e.g., one for violating the hand-held section of the law and one for violating the texting section of the law).

Driver Gender

While men and women make up similar proportions of New York’s driver license population (51% and 49%, respectively), men are much more likely to be ticketed for non-compliance with the cell phone laws. In 2015, two-thirds (67%) of the drivers ticketed were men and one-third (33%) were women (Figure 10).

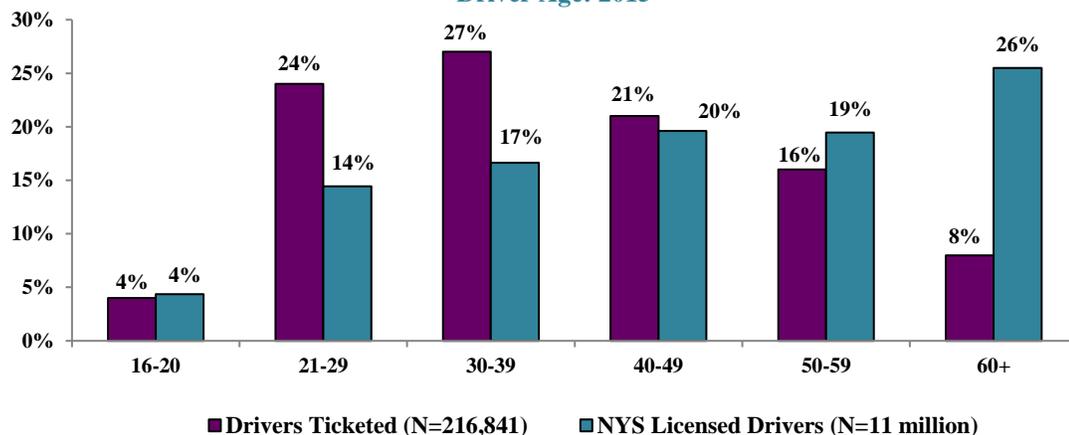
Figure 10
Non-Compliance with the NYS Cell Phone Laws
Drivers Ticketed vs. NY Licensed Drivers
Driver Gender: 2015



Driver Age

For the analyses by age, the population of drivers was once again divided into six categories: 16-20 years; 21-29 years; 30-39 years; 40-49 years; 50-59 years; and 60 years and over. As Figure 11 shows, drivers ages 21-29 and 30-39 were the most overrepresented in tickets issued for non-compliance with the cell phone laws (24% vs. 14% and 27% vs. 17%, respectively).

Figure 11
Non-Compliance with the NYS Cell Phone Laws
Drivers Ticketed vs. NY Licensed Drivers
Driver Age: 2015



Drivers 60 years of age and older were underrepresented in the tickets issued for cell phone violations (8% vs. 26%).

2016 DRIVER BEHAVIOR SURVEY

Since 2010, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has required all states to conduct an annual survey of drivers to collect information on self-reported driving behaviors and perceptions of enforcement. To meet this requirement, New York conducted its seventh annual driver survey at five NYS Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) offices in April-June 2016. Three of the DMV offices selected for the survey are in New York's upstate region: Albany (Albany County), Syracuse (Onondaga County) and Yonkers (Westchester County); one office is in New York City (Brooklyn) and one is on Long Island (Medford, Suffolk County). Over the seven years that the driver survey has been conducted, the questions pertaining to cell phone use and texting have changed. Beginning with 2013, the survey has included six questions on cell phone use in addition to questions on seat belt use, speeding and impaired driving. Information was also collected on the age, gender and county of residence of the participants. Since the questions have remained the same for the past four years, the analyses focused on the surveys conducted in 2013-2016. The results from these analyses are summarized in Table 4.

TALKING ON A CELL PHONE WHILE DRIVING

As indicated in Table 4, the proportion of drivers who reported that they never talk on a cell phone rose from 37% in 2013 to 42% in 2016. In each of the four years, 2013-2016, the proportion of drivers who reported that they "always" or "most of the time" talk on a cell phone remained constant at 8%-9%. When talking on a cell phone, 28% of the drivers in 2016 reported that they "always" or "most of the time" use a hand-held phone in violation of the law, down from 35% in 2013.

With regard to enforcement of the hand-held cell phone law, in 2016, 48% of the drivers thought that they would be ticketed "always" (22%) or "most of the time" (26%) for using a cell phone while driving, up from 44% in 2013. Over the four years, the proportion of drivers who thought that they would "rarely" or "never" get a ticket remained fairly constant at 19%-21%.

Table 4				
NYS Driver Behavior Survey: Cell Phone				
	2013	2014	2015	2016
<i>How often do you talk on a cell phone while driving?</i>	(N=1,534)	(N=1,528)	(N=1,500)	(N=1,500)
Always	2.0%	3.4%	3.4%	2.9%
Most of the time	6.3%	5.9%	4.8%	5.5%
Sometimes	26.8%	23.6%	23.9%	20.9%
Rarely	27.9%	27.7%	25.9%	28.9%
Never	37.0%	39.3%	42.0%	41.7%
<i>When you talk on a cell phone while driving, how often do you use a hand-held phone?</i>				
Always	19.0%	17.0%	20.8%	17.0%
Most of the time	15.9%	13.3%	13.5%	11.4%
Sometimes	20.4%	20.2%	16.8%	15.7%
Rarely	20.2%	24.5%	23.4%	24.5%
Never	24.4%	25.0%	25.5%	31.4%
<i>What do you think the chances are of getting a ticket if you talk on a hand-held phone while driving?</i>				
Always	17.9%	19.3%	20.6%	22.1%
Most of the time	25.9%	26.5%	26.3%	25.9%
Sometimes	37.5%	33.5%	32.8%	31.9%
Rarely	12.1%	13.5%	12.4%	12.4%
Never	6.6%	7.3%	7.9%	7.7%

TEXTING WHILE DRIVING

The proportion of drivers who reported that they send or receive text messages while driving fluctuated over the four years, 2013-2016. As shown in Table 5, 48%-52% reported that they send or receive text messages while driving; 8%-9% each year reported that they text while driving “always” or “most of the time”.

With regard to enforcement of the texting while driving law, the proportion of drivers who thought that they would be ticketed “always” or “most of the time” for texting while driving increased from 41% in 2013 to 48% in 2016. In 2016, 25% of the drivers thought they would “always” get a ticket and an additional 23% thought they would get a ticket “most of the time.” Over the four years, the proportion of drivers who thought that they would “rarely” or “never” get a ticket for texting while driving dropped from 25% in 2013 to 22% in 2016.

Over the four years, very little variation occurred among drivers with regard to whether texting affects a driver’s ability to drive safely. In 2016, almost all of the drivers (96%) thought that texting while driving impairs a driver’s ability to drive safely “a great deal” (83%) or “somewhat” (13%). Only 4% of the drivers thought that texting while driving would “not at all” affect a driver’s ability to drive safely.

Table 5				
NYS Driver Behavior Survey: Texting				
	2013 (N=1,500)	2014 (N=1,500)	2015 (N=1,500)	2016 (N=1,500)
<i>How often do you send or receive texts messages while driving?</i>				
Always	2.9%	3.2%	3.2%	2.9%
Most of the time	5.9%	5.6%	4.6%	5.1%
Sometimes	21.5%	19.5%	19.1%	19.7%
Rarely	21.5%	21.6%	21.3%	23.0%
Never	48.2%	50.0%	51.7%	49.3%
<i>What do you think the chances are of getting a ticket if you text while driving?</i>				
Always	18.7%	23.2%	24.3%	25.1%
Most of the time	22.6%	20.3%	21.1%	23.4%
Sometimes	33.3%	32.9%	32.4%	29.6%
Rarely	17.8%	15.5%	14.3%	13.5%
Never	7.6%	8.1%	7.8%	8.4%
<i>Do you think texting affects a driver’s ability to drive safely....?</i>				
A great deal	83.9%	83.6%	84.3%	82.7%
Somewhat	12.8%	13.0%	11.8%	13.3%
Not at all	3.3%	3.4%	3.9%	4.0%

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Conducted by the Institute for Traffic Safety Management and Research, this 2016 multi-method study of cell phone use and other distracted driving behaviors examined their effects on crashes and fatalities. Because New York’s law bans hand-held cell phone use and texting while driving, it was important to determine the extent to which drivers are using cell phones in compliance with the law. The study had three primary components: 1) analyses of fatal and personal injury crashes in which cell phones and other driver distractions were involved, 2) analyses of traffic tickets issued to drivers for non-compliance with New York’s cell phone and texting laws, and 3) a driver behavior survey.

The results from the driver behavior survey conducted by ITSMR at five DMV offices in 2016 reinforce the concerns regarding texting while driving. Nearly six out of ten drivers (58%) reported that they talk on their cell phone while driving and 8% talk on the phone “all” or “most of the time” when driving. Texting while driving also remains a serious problem. In 2016, one-half (51%) of the drivers said that they send or receive text messages while driving and 8% text “all” or “most of the time” while behind the wheel. These texting behaviors persist despite 96% of the drivers believing that texting impairs a driver’s ability to drive safely “a great deal” (83%) or “somewhat” (13%).

Although the risks associated with the use of cell phones to talk or text while driving are widely recognized, it is difficult to quantify that risk with a high degree of accuracy based on available crash data. Since the passage of New York’s cell phone law more than a decade ago, cell phone use continues to be a relatively minor factor in crashes, with cell phone use reported as a contributory factor in less than one percent of the fatal and personal injury crashes. Even if better reporting resulted in more crashes being associated with cell phone use, the proportion of crashes in which cell phone use was involved would continue to remain well below the levels of other dangerous driving behaviors such as speeding and impaired driving.

In contrast to the reported involvement of cell phone use in crashes, distracted driving in all its various forms has been a consistent and substantial threat to highway safety for many years. Over the past decade, the proportion of fatal and personal injury crashes in which distracted driving was reported as a contributing factor rose slowly from 18% in 2007 to 22% in 2016.

New York State continues to be a national leader in addressing distracted driving through legislation and through the Governor’s Traffic Safety Committee’s support for public awareness and enforcement initiatives. More than 1.2 million tickets were issued for violating the hand-held cell phone and text messaging laws between 2011 and 2015. While high visibility enforcement appears to be effective in increasing compliance with the cell phone and texting laws, the majority of distracted driving behaviors are not illegal. Reducing these types of distracted driving behaviors requires more efforts to raise awareness of the dangers associated with engaging in any behaviors or actions that take attention away from the driving task. More complete reporting by police officers on the specific types of distraction that contributed to a crash would provide valuable information to increase the effectiveness of future public awareness efforts and other initiatives.

REFERENCES

1. **CTIA** – The Wireless Association website: www.ctia.org/your-wireless-life/how-wireless-works/annual-wireless-industry-survey
2. **Governors Highway Safety Association** website: www.ghsa.org/html/stateinfo/laws/cellphone_laws.html.

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