

Driver Distractions in the Transportation Industry



Distracted driving drastically increases the risk of getting into an accident. The goal of a driver operating a passenger-carrying vehicle is to deliver their passengers to their destination as safely as possible.

100% of a driver's focus must be on driving. Unfortunately, events such as parties or busy businesses requiring assistance can increase distractions and cause dangerous road situations.

It requires a great deal of patience and discipline as a professional driver to maintain focus in such a distracting environment. To ensure that customers can have an enjoyable experience without compromising safety, it's important for drivers to manage any distracting situation swiftly and safely. Consider the following recommendations for drivers to help lower the risk of distractions from passengers.

🕒 We Recommend:

Education

Educate drivers on the increasing trend of accidents caused by distracted driving and how it can endanger their lives as well as the lives of their passengers. Statistics don't lie; even being distracted for a couple of seconds greatly increases the risk of an accident occurring.

Training Programs

Provide a collision-prevention training program that incorporates scenarios of passenger distractions that may occur on the job. Training can include:

- How to identify potentially unruly passengers
- Procedures to manage distracting passengers
- How to assertively & professionally enforce the rules of the vehicle

You can reduce risks by managing distracted driving, with the help of these provided tips. In order to make safety your first priority, employees should follow the guidelines and policies set by the company. It's also essential that no laws are broken by the driver or passenger, including concerning alcohol consumption inside the vehicle.



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Passenger Policies

Ensure passengers know the rules and consequences of misbehavior by thoroughly defining them when the service contract is signed. The driver can further inform passengers of the rules prior to boarding, and remind them that they're responsible for their actions, which could pose a risk to their own safety. The driver may want to give a warning to passengers that are starting to become uncontrollable, and they must follow up with the consequences for broken rules.

Zero Tolerance for Substance Abuse

Alcohol consumption is common in party buses and limousines. However, belligerent behavior and unruliness must not be tolerated. Be strict with the alcohol policy that has been set by the company, as well as laws pertaining to alcohol consumption. Finally, ensure passengers know there is absolutely no tolerance for smoking or use of illegal drugs inside the vehicle.

Use an Assistant

Use an assistant or a chaperone to respond to distractions and to manage passenger behavior if needed. An assistant would be particularly useful when carrying a larger number of passengers, and to assist new drivers.

Judgement

The driver's primary responsibility is to safely transport everyone in the vehicle. If there's any disruption that may inhibit that purpose, the driver can always pull over in a safe location until the distraction is settled. If a passenger is becoming aggressive and the driver feels threatened, they should call the authorities to help settle the dispute.

🕒 Dispatch Communication with Drivers:

Communication with the driver, while in transit, is a major issue in the passenger industry. In Ontario, it's against the law to operate hand-held communication and electronic entertainment devices while you're driving (the law clearly states that it's against the law to view display screens unrelated to your driving).

Examples of handheld devices include (but are not limited to):

- Cell phones and Smartphones
- iPods and MP3 players
- GPS
- Laptops
- DVD players

It's recommended that all fleets ensure — as part of the training and internal policies — that no driver use a handheld device with or without a passenger in the vehicle. A simple policy statement can be included in the driver package and stored as part of the driver file. (See the *sample policy statement attached*)

In some cases, dispatch or fleet managers must immediately get in touch with a driver. The challenge is to ensure that the driver (and dispatch) are not breaking the law or placing a passenger in danger by using a handheld device while driving. All communications needs to be safe for the driver and the client while still meeting business needs. You can avoid this communication dilemma with some careful preparation:

Frequent check-in times (where possible)

Suggested to ensure that the driver and dispatch are communicating regularly for any updates or changes. Check-in times can vary depending on the driver's drop-off and pick-up schedule. While this may not always be an option for limousine drivers, a policy could be established requiring drivers to check-in upon arrival at a destination, as well as after drop-off. This provides some opportunity for the driver and dispatch to communicate important information.

In the event that dispatch needs to speak to the driver directly (while they are with a customer), a policy could be established where a call is placed to the driver with no voicemail delivered. If dispatch calls back immediately, this should be a notification to the driver that they need to speak as soon as possible. Always be honest with the passenger and let them know that you need to reach dispatch.

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Bluetooth headsets

Bluetooth headsets can be an effective way for a driver to communicate with dispatch. Using a Bluetooth device allows the driver to quickly communicate with dispatch and receive any updated information with minimal disruption to any passengers.

Telematics

Another solution for passenger fleets to explore is the use of telematics or GPS software. Telematics is essentially the means of sending, receiving and storing information relating to remote objects (like vehicles) via telecommunications devices.

Some of the benefits of using telematics include:

- Real time status - Drivers can receive current statuses and information can be sent back to dispatch and management. This eliminates the need to actually speak to the driver over the phone, and it reduces distractions on the road.
- Ease of use - Communication applications can run on multiple devices, from smartphones to tablets and other tools.
- Safety - Instructions can be programmed so that messages are only received when the driver is stopped.
- Driver management - know where your drivers are at all times.
- Manage assets - know where your equipment is at all times.

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⦿ Distraction-Free Driving Policy Statement (*Sample only*)

Traffic crashes are among the leading causes of death and injury in Ontario.

Because **(company name)** is committed to establishing and following practices that make working here safer, and because we value the safety and well-being of all employees of **(company name)**, we are instituting a distraction-free driving policy to promote safe driving habits.

Using a cell phone while driving increases the risk of a crash. **(company name)** employees must refrain from using any form of handheld devices while operating a motor vehicle. **(company name)** employees must not initiate or respond to phone calls, read or respond to text messages or emails while driving with Traffic crashes are among the leading causes of death and injury in Ontario. **(company name)** employees who need to make an emergency call while on the road must first park the vehicle in a safe location.

Failure to follow company policy and refrain from talking on the phone, texting or emailing while driving on or off the job may result in:

- _____
- _____
- _____

I have received a written copy of **(company name)** distraction-free driving policy. I fully understand the terms of this policy and agree to abide by them.

Sign and print your name, add today's date, and return this form to your supervisor.

Employee Signature

Employee Name (please print)

Date