

## DRIVING AND DIALING: TEENS AND ADULTS COMPETE IN RECENT FORD STUDY

**D**river distraction studies finds teenagers to be as much as 56 percent more distracted than adults when operating a cellular phone while driving. Regardless of hands-free operation, cellular phones pose a distraction while driving, according to the results of a recent driver distraction study conducted by Ford's Scientific Research Laboratory.

However, using Ford's VIRTUAL Test Track EXPERIMENT (VIRTTEX), the study also proved when operating a cellular phone with hands-free technology, the driver was noticeably less distracted. "Some research has suggested that hands-free technology doesn't really reduce distraction," said Jeff Greenberg, Staff Technical Specialist of Safety Research. However, "for short conversations where the driver is trying to work with simple information, we found that hands-free really does make a big improvement."

The forty-eight adults and fifteen teenagers who participated in the study were asked to combine an everyday simulated driving experience with

performing various tasks including phone dialing, voicemail retrieval, manual radio tuning and climate control adjustment.

While each participant was trying to complete a given task, he or she was asked to respond to sudden movements in surrounding traffic, such as a swerving vehicle. Vehicle control was measured by lane violations and heading error. For the adult drivers, the most distracting tasks to perform were hand-held voicemail retrieval and hand-held phone dialing while hands-free voicemail retrieval did not significantly distract participants.

Results studying teenage drivers show that they are more susceptible to in-car distractions than adults. Due greatly to their driving inexperience, teenage participants were found to choose small following distances, leaving less room for error. They performed the same tasks as the adults with a greater occurrence of error; some to a drastic extent. The lane violation rate for the hand-held voicemail task was 56 percent higher for teens than adults. Similarly, teens

missed 53.8 percent of the events occurring in front of them when dialing a hand-held phone.

With such overwhelming results, it appears that many teens give the dialing task equal or higher priority than scanning the driving scene. The results indicate a serious cause for concern according to Greenberg: "Cellular phones, pagers and other devices are popular among teens. The results of the study, at a minimum, indicate that driver education curricula should be revised to address the use of communication technology while driving."

While driver's education may become more advanced, Greenberg also believes vehicles will become more intelligent. "There's never a good time to answer your cellular phone while driving. I see a future with vehicle systems intelligent enough to gauge traffic and manage your workload. Incoming calls could be sent directly to voicemail if the vehicle sensed high-stress surroundings. Deferring to voicemail might get around the distraction problem."

Ford's VIRTTEX is one of the most advanced laboratories of its kind in the world. Since 2000, Ford Motor Company has used the controlled laboratory setting to study everyday driving tasks and how they affect driver performance during a variety of simulated driving experiences. ■



## Delivering the driver's edge to teen drivers.

Traditional driver's education has focused on the skills needed to pass a driving test, with classroom lectures and some behind-the-wheel "on-the-job training." The DrivingMBA™ program goes beyond this, bringing high-tech simulators to everyday drivers.



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These components are available as a discounted package or individually:

- **Rules of the Road® DVD** : Award-winning interactive DVD tutorial for home use.
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- **Safe Young Drivers** : A book to supplement your own in-vehicle training.
- **Advanced Decision Skill Building** : The same high-end simulator used by police and other professionals to improve behind-the-wheel decision-making skills.
- **Profiler™** : Assesses your skills against a pro database (included with Advanced Decision Skill Building).
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