

Distractions and Solutions for Commercial Vehicle Drivers

Managing distractions in commercial vehicles

Commercial vehicle drivers have to manage all the same distractions as other motorists, and more. In addition to their driving responsibilities, commercial drivers are sometimes asked to conduct secondary tasks such as responding to a dispatch call, receiving routing instructions or checking a mobile data terminal. Even though they are skilled professionals, distractions can often force drivers into situations that often exceed their ability to safely operate a vehicle. Employers, supervisors, dispatchers and drivers must understand that non-driving tasks can become harmful distractions. Driving safety must always take priority.



Electronic equipment

- Select electronic devices that are easy to use.
- Choose voice-activated devices over ones that require manual entry. (That said, it's important to know that "hands-free" does not mean "distraction free." Hands-free devices are no safer than handheld devices.)
- Choose devices with large screens and panels that are easy to see and read.
- Mount equipment securely and within reach. Make sure the equipment does not interfere with the view of any gauges, traffic or the road.

Two-way radio calls

- Set the volume control to an adequate level prior to driving.
- If the call is important, decide if driving conditions allow you to safely accept the call. Conduct a visual sweep of your driving environment – mirrors, gauges and the road ahead.
- If you decide that now is not a good time, ignore the call or briefly respond that you will call them back when conditions are safer. Again, keep your eyes on the road.
- If necessary, ask your dispatcher to speak in a clear, understandable voice.



General advice for commercial drivers

It's not the device that is safe or dangerous; it's how you decide to use it. If you program the navigation system while driving, you are breaking the law and engaging in a potentially costly distraction.

- Program your route before you set out for the trip.
- Ensure the device is securely mounted and is in a readily visible location but does not obstruct or reduce your view of the area around your vehicle, including rear view mirrors.
- If the device needs to be re-programmed during the trip, pull over where it safe to do so.

Interacting with a dispatcher

Whether it's a two-way radio or mobile phone, interacting with a dispatcher can be a significant driving distraction, especially if the information is complex, or if you can't hear or understand the information.



The best advice is to avoid detailed instructions while driving. Unless the message is brief and simple, you should safely stop your truck to receive and record any necessary information. If your company insists on driver-dispatcher communications while driving, as permitted by law, below are a few ideas to help reduce your risk.

Mobile phones

- Use the signal lockout feature available on mobile devices. This feature lets you decide when to take a call and when not to, such as during critical driving periods.
- Consider using an earpiece. To comply with the law, you can use an earpiece only if you wear it in one ear and in conjunction with a hands-free phone.



Putting on / removing eyewear

- Store eyewear in a handy location easily within your reach and only clean eyewear when safely parked.

Mobile data terminals, laptops or tablets used as part of your mobile work

Some organizations require the use of laptops or tablets. These devices pose a double threat: a high-risk driver distraction, and a projectile in the event of a crash.



- Although permitted under law, limit interactions with mobile data terminals.
- If a mobile data terminal is used, mount this device securely to a fixed pedestal or dock. In addition, mount the device to minimize your risk of striking the device or mounting assembly in the event of a crash.
- Never operate a laptop or tablet while driving.

Searching for addresses or street names (e.g. deliveries or client destinations)

• Check and or print the maps and program your navigation system before getting underway. Use online satellite and street views to see where you will need to make turns, or to learn what your destination looks like.

Stress - thinking about job demands, deadlines or previous stressful situations

Problems at home or at work can be stressful, which in turn can cause you to become distracted behind the wheel.



- Take steps to reduce your stress — use your break periods to get a little fresh air and exercise. Walk around your vehicle a few times at each stop, if it's safe to do so.
- If available, make use of your employee assistance program during your break period or when at home. It can provide confidential counselling and other services.

Loose items in the cab

Safely secure and stow all items inside your cab. If these items aren't secured, they can slide or fall under your feet, interfering with pedal operations and steering manoeuvres. And while such items are sliding or falling, they distract your attention.

- Have a place for everything, and keep everything in its place. If an item doesn't have a secure location, it doesn't belong in your cab.
- Use a water bottle that fits your cup holder.
- Secure your lunch box.
- Keep your pens, logbooks and other items off the dash. Even small items become dangerous projectiles during a crash.

Checking mirrors, gauges and other truck functions

Although these actions are a necessary part of driving a truck, they also have distraction factors. There are a few easy tricks you can use to minimize them.



- Memorize the "normal operating" position of the indicator needle for all gauges. That way, with a quick glance you can tell if any of the indicators are outside the normal range.
- Properly adjust mirrors before setting out.
- At night, dim the dash panel lights. This not only reduces glare and eases eye fatigue, it lets you maintain that same watch over truck functions with less distraction.
- Keep your cab clean. Regularly wipe or dust off gauges. Let nothing obstruct your view.

Complex, non-essential tasks

- Always avoid cleaning mirrors, rummaging through your lunch bag, writing on a notepad or searching for an item while driving. If you ever need to stretch to reach an item, use that as a reminder to safely pull over.

For more on safe driving and transportation, visit:
www.ihsa.ca/roadsafetyatwork