

# Study: Distracted driving laws don't stop crashes

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JOELLE TESSLER

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WASHINGTON (AP) - A new insurance industry study has found that state laws banning the use of handheld devices to make calls or send text messages while driving have not resulted in fewer vehicle crashes.

The study, released Friday by the Highway Loss Data Institute, examined insurance claims from crashes before and after such bans took effect in California, New York, Connecticut and Washington, D.C.

The organization found that claims rates did not go down after the laws were enacted. It also found no change in patterns compared with nearby states without such bans.

Adrian Lund, the group's president, said the finding doesn't bode well "for any safety payoff from all the new laws."

Six states and the District of Columbia ban talking on a hand-held device for all drivers, while 19 states and the District of Columbia ban texting while driving, according to the Governors Highway Safety Association.

The Highway Loss Data Institute, an affiliate of the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, said its findings "don't match what we already know about the risk of phoning and texting while driving" and said it is gathering data to "figure out this mismatch."

It said one explanation could be an increase in the use of handsfree devices in places with bans on handset use while driving.

Jonathan Adkins, a spokesman for the governors association, said the new study "raises as many questions as it answers." The group is concerned that bans on handheld devices simply encourage more drivers to use handsfree devices, which, it says, are just as risky.

The governors association is urging states to pass texting bans, but hold off on banning other cell phone use while driving until there is more data. The National Safety Council, meanwhile, supports a total ban on cell phone use while driving, including the use of handsfree devices.



In the Senate, Democratic Sens. Charles Schumer of New York and Robert Menendez of New Jersey have introduced a bill that would reduce federal highway aid by 25 percent to states that don't pass laws banning texting by all drivers.

Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood also has been campaigning against texting and cell phone use while driving. In a blog post Friday, LaHood dismissed the new study's conclusions as irresponsible and said the study will lead people "to wrongly conclude that talking on cell phones while driving is not dangerous."

"At this early stage in our work against distracted driving, no one should be discouraging strong nationwide efforts to make our roadways safer," LaHood wrote. "Unfortunately, a study released by the Highway Loss Data Institute casts doubt on the reality of this epidemic."

Earlier this week, the Transportation Department banned truck and bus drivers from sending text messages on hand-held devices while operating commercial vehicles of more than 10,000 pounds. Federal employees are also prohibited from texting while driving government-owned vehicles or using government-owned equipment.

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