

Motor Carrier Safety Advisory Committee (MCSAC)
Task Statement
Task #10-02

I. TASK TITLE
Combating Distracted Driving

II. BACKGROUND

On September 30-October 1, 2009, the U.S. Department of Transportation held a summit on distracted driving to exchange information and ideas on the best possible methods to reduce the number of crashes and fatalities due to distracted driving. The summit included senior Department of Transportation (DOT) officers, elected officials, safety advocates, law enforcement representatives, private sector representatives, and academicians. The participants addressed a range of issues related to reducing crashes through enforcement, public awareness, and education and led interactive panel discussions on a number of key topics including the extent and impact of distracted driving, current research, regulations, and best practices. Participants examined distractions caused by current and planned automotive devices, such as navigational and voice operated systems.

Since the Department's historic Distracted Driving Summit last fall, FMCSA has played an active role in supporting Secretary LaHood's efforts in bringing to bear all the tools at DOT's disposal to address this critical safety issue. FMCSA completed its "Driver Distraction in Commercial Vehicle Operations" study and released the final report on October 1, 2009. The purpose of the study was to investigate the prevalence of driver distraction in CMV safety-critical events (*e.g.*, crashes, near-crashes, unintended lane departures). The study included over 200 truck drivers and 3 million miles of data. The dataset was obtained by placing video recorders on vehicles and monitoring the behavior of real drivers driving in real-world situations.

The study concluded that drivers who engage in texting took their eyes off the road for an average of 4.6 seconds out of the 6 seconds prior to a safety-critical event. At 55 miles per hour, this means that the driver is traveling the length of a football field, including the end zones, without looking at the road and is 23 times more likely to have a safety critical event than drivers who do not text while driving. Because of the safety risks associated with texting while driving, FMCSA took expedited action. The Agency published regulatory guidance in the Federal Register on January 27 regarding the applicability of current regulations to texting by commercial motor vehicle drivers. The regulatory guidance clarified that truck and bus drivers operating in interstate commerce who text while driving commercial vehicles may be subject to civil or criminal penalties of up to \$2,750.

FMCSA followed up on the regulatory guidance by publishing a NPRM with an explicit prohibition against texting on April 1, 2010. The NPRM also provides driver disqualification penalties that would enable FMCSA and its State partners to take unsafe drivers off of the road. A Final Rule on texting will be published in the fall. The Agency is considering whether other high risk driver distractions should be addressed in a subsequent notice-and-comment rulemaking.

Presently, FMCSA is developing a NPRM that would limit or restrict the use of wireless telephones by certain CMV operators in interstate commerce. This NPRM will be published later this year.

III. TASK

The Committee should provide a letter report to the Agency providing specific ideas, concepts and information the Agency might consider in addressing the safety risk posed by in-cab distractions other than texting and cell phone use by CMV drivers in interstate commerce. The Committee should consider the full range of electronic equipment, including mobile communication/tracking technologies (sometimes referred to as “fleet management systems”) used in truck cabs and motorcoaches. In preparing its letter report to the Agency, the Committee should, wherever possible, indicate whether the ideas or concepts identified are supported by studies, currently an industry best practice, or if the ideas or concepts have been effective in other transportation modes.

IV. ESTIMATED TIME TO COMPLETE TASK

The Committee should submit its report at its August 2010 meeting.

V. FMCSA TECHNICAL REPRESENTATIVES

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