You’re toodling along the highway thinking about the hospice patient you’re about to visit. He’s been feeling much better lately, pain is under control so his sleep is much more restful, and his family says he’s been talking more, laughing some. Maybe now is the time to . . . . RING! Drat! Where’s that stupid phone now? Not in this pocket. RING! Put down the coffee and check the other pocket. RING! In your tote bag? You need one of those little hangey things . . . RING! . . . so you can keep it on your belt. Rats! There it is on the floorboard by the passenger door. RING! Can you reach it? Check the road. All clear. RING! Now just lean over, just a little more. Skooch it over with your fingertips. One last lunge. Got it!!

During the time all this happened, if you were driving at 60 mph on this fictional highway, taking your eyes off the road for those two seconds means you traveled BLINDLY for half the length of a football field. Even if you held the car steady in your own lane while reaching for the phone, what might happen in those two seconds over the 150 feet of road you traveled? This visual, manual, and cognitive distraction is more dangerous than many people recognize and, believe it or not, there is no difference in the cognitive distraction between hand-held and hands-free phones.

Cell phones aren’t the only problem, of course. Distracted driving is just plain risky whether you’re eating lunch on the run, tending to children, talking to passengers, or looking at objects out the window. Almost 80% of crashes and 65% of near-crashes happen within 3 seconds of some form of driver distraction. Cell phone distractions slow your reaction time by 18%, double your risk of a rear-end collision, and increase your probability of running a red light. And multitasking is a contributing factor in 93% of crashes and minor collisions. Reading a map or directions, swatting at an insect, checking e-mail, you name it. Some distractions you can prevent, others you cannot, but answering or making a call on a cell phone is purely avoidable. Texting while driving is also a distraction that can lead to accidents and put you and others on the road at risk.

Let’s re-run the scenario above with this information in mind:

RING! Drat! Where’s that stupid phone now? Let me
▪ PULL OFF TO A SAFE PLACE AND THEN TAKE THE CALL   Or
RING! RING! RING! Thank goodness I’ve decided to
▪ MODIFY MY VOICE MAIL GREETING TO INDICATE I AM UNAVAILABLE TO ANSWER OR RETURN CALLS WHILE DRIVING.

No cell phone call is worth a fender bender or worse. If you’re going to be late and need to phone ahead, pull off to the side of the road to make the call. The extra minute you take to call safely is a minute well spent. Drive defensively and focus on your driving while on the road. Stay safe

These safety tips only translate into safety if you translate them into action. Make a commitment now to yourself to

▪ Stop answering the phone while you drive
▪ Stop making phone calls while you drive
▪ Stop texting while driving
▪ Drive defensively to stay safe.
Make a sticky note and put it on the dash that says

 CELL PHONE FREE ZONE

Cell Phone Use While Driving Fact Sheet
from the National Safety Council

- Using cell phones while driving is a very high risk behavior with significant impact on crashes and society. More than 50 peer-reviewed scientific studies have identified the risks associated with cell phone use while driving.

- Drivers who use cell phones are four times more likely to be in a crash while using a cell phone. (1997 New England Journal of Medicine examination of hospital records and 2005 Insurance Institute for Highway Safety study linking crashes to cell phone records).

- There is no difference in the cognitive distraction between hand-held and hands-free devices. (Simulator studies at the U. of Utah.)

- Cell phone use contributes to an estimated 6 percent of all crashes, which equates to 636,000 crashes, 330,000 injuries, 12,000 serious injuries and 2,600 deaths each year. (Harvard Center of Risk Analysis).

- 80 percent of crashes are related to driver inattention. There are certain activities that may be more dangerous than talking on a cell phone. However, cell phone use occurs more frequently and for longer durations than other, riskier behaviors. Thus, the #1 source of driver inattention is cell phones. (Virginia Tech 100-car study for NHTSA)

- It is estimated that more than 100 million people use cell phones while driving. (CTIA – The Wireless Association reports 270 million cell phone subscribers. A Nationwide Insurance public opinion poll showed 81 percent of the public admit to talking on a cell phone while driving).

- The annual cost of crashes caused by cell phone use is estimated to be $43 billion (Harvard Center for Risk Analysis).

- Talking to a passenger while driving is significantly safer than talking on a cell phone. (University of Utah)

- Many businesses understand the risk and are already taking action. Among NSC members that responded to a survey, 45 percent (651 of 1453 respondents) said their companies had a cell phone policy of some kind. Of those, 22 percent said they re-engineered their processes to accommodate the policy and 85 percent said the policy did not affect productivity.

(from www.nsc.org--National Safety Council)