

Are Cell-phone-crazed drivers dangerous?

Much ado is made about the supposed danger of cell-phone-crazed drivers, with horrible statistics thrown around to “prove” that we need to get these madmen and madwomen off our streets.

Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood held a press conference the other day to decry drivers texting and talking while zipping down the road. But then, Ray LaHood is against Everything Dangerous.

Then comes the statistical blast: Phone use while driving is so dangerous that nearly 6,000 people were killed last year in accidents in which “distracted driving” was “among” the causes.

Let’s break that down. The “scare” headline and the lead of the Associated Press story are all about cell phones. People rant about drivers using cell phones. But apparently, no one keeps track of wrecks caused by cell phones — probably because the total is so small as to be statistically insignificant.

That 6,000 deaths includes those at least partly attributed to distracted drivers. They may have been texting, talking, eating, drinking, playing video games, reading, watching a movie on their iPod, turning to see someone in a passing car, checking a crying child.

There are a lot of distractions on the road, to be sure. But many of those drivers may have been drunk or otherwise impaired, ill, old, you name it. Distraction is only one of the causes a police officer may have listed on his report.

So the truth of the matter, though hard to pin down, is that drivers using cell phones probably caused no more than a third to half of those wrecks. Say 2,000 deaths or less.

And while no one would say any one of those deaths was insignificant, it hardly amounts to an epidemic of cell-phone-related carnage. A few, maybe, but nothing compared to the 34,400 who died because of drunk driving, a number that’s greatly reduced in recent years, by the way.

But the statistics can be, and have been, manipulated to make this appear to be a serious problem.

“To put it plainly,” the distracted LaHood says, “distracted driving is a menace to society. Distracted driving is an epidemic, and it seems to be getting worse every day.”

He gave no statistics to back that up. Senators are calling for states that don’t crack down on texting and talking to lose a quarter of their federal highway money — though given the state of the highway trust fund, that might not be much of a threat.

Why? So there’ll be just one more federal mandate? Shouldn’t someone first establish a need? Then propose a workable solution?

Banning cell phones from cars is a bad idea. The benefits of mobile communications are such that people won’t give them up. They may be far greater, in fact, than the dangers, though no one has thought to quantify them.

Instead, let’s ask for responsibility. It makes sense that no driver ought to be carrying on a text-message conversation which can involve a hand or two, the eyes, the brain and maybe some toes — but what about dialing a phone number? Or reading a text? It may be hard to draw the line.

Some states have made both illegal, yet others are texting or sending Twitter messages to drivers advising of road conditions. Talk about mixed messages.

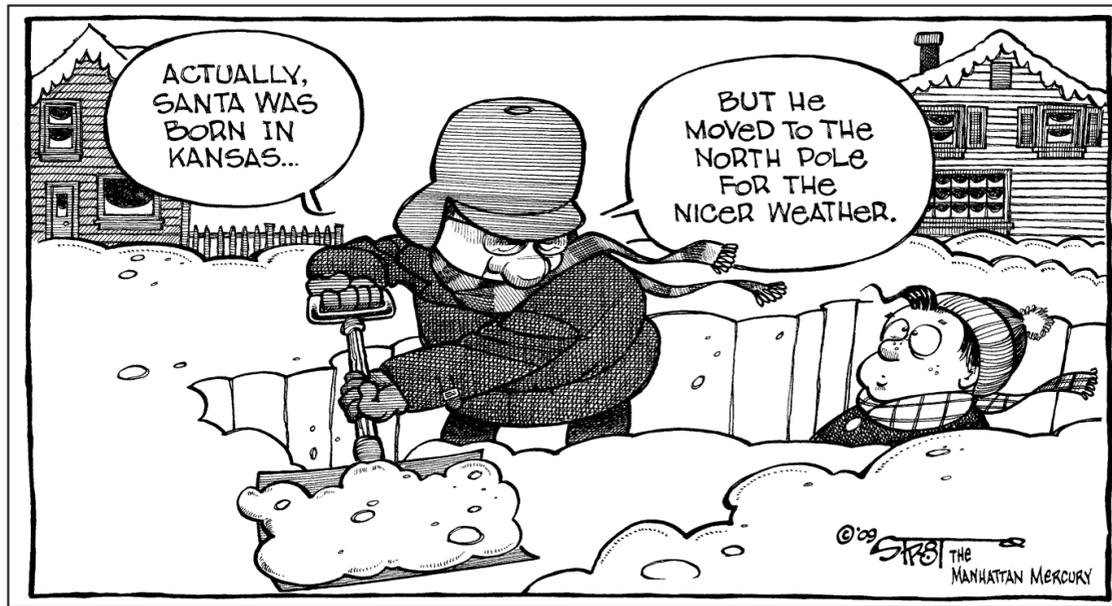
Holding a phone in one hand? Most people have done it, but requiring a hands-free device doesn’t sound unreasonable. The image of a driver speeding down the street, phone to the ear, head cocked to one side, just screams “dangerous.”

But then a lot of this is emotional, not rational. With so little to go in the realm of facts, and so many overblown claims and scare stats, it’s no wonder people get riled up.

Our view: Let’s outlaw texting and hand-held conversations, and tell people that when they talk — or eat or drink or ogle a pretty girl or a breathtaking sunset — they’ll be held accountable when they hit something.

Responsibility ought to be the key, not a regulation that would be hard to enforce and harder still to sell to the public. Responsibility, and a return to responsible use of statistics.

— Steve Haynes



Christmas a difficult time for some

I was talking with a friend the other day about what he thought I should write about and he remarked, “Christmas.” My first thought was “what can I add” quickly followed by the reminder that the first anniversary of my father’s death is on Friday and I’m not really in the mood to celebrate. But you know what — this is a difficult time for many people — especially alcoholics and addicts — so I am not alone.

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) also realizes this and here are some of the ideas they have for folks trying to get through the holiday season without drinking. Of course, the ideas would also apply to addicts and anyone else who is having a difficult time.

- Line up extra recovery activities for the holiday season. Focus on taking newcomers meetings, answer the phone or visit alcoholics who are shut in or in the hospital
- Host your own recovery party! If you don’t have room for a group at your place — go to the local coffee house or restaurant.

Where There’s Hope

Carla Moore

- Keep your list of recovery contacts with you if you find yourself overwhelmed and wanting to drink or use. Put off the decision to do a substance until AFTER you have called a recovery friend.

- Find out about other special holiday parties, meetings or celebrations in your area and go. If you’re shy — take a friend!

- Skip any drinking occasion you are nervous about.

- If you have to go to a drinking party and can’t take A.A. with you, keep some candy handy. Or...take your phone list and excuse yourself to the bathroom for a quick “pick-me-up” phone call to a recovering friend.

- Don’t think you have to stay late at a

party. Plan ahead to have an “important date” that you have to keep.

- Worship your own way.
- Don’t sit around brooding. Read, listen to music, visit a museum, or write letters.

- Don’t start now getting worked up about all those holiday temptations. Remember to stay in today and not borrow worry from tomorrow.

- Enjoy the true beauty of the holiday love and joy. Maybe you cannot give material gifts this year but you can give your love, time and appreciation.

- Step 12 — carry the message of recovery to others!

I hope that helps you as much as just writing it helped me. Thanks, Doc, for the idea and know that today I am making a choice to enjoy this season by reaching out to those who are here, remembering those who are not and praying for all who are.

What do you need to know? How can I help you on your journey? Email me at cmoore@valleyhope.com. Namaste - Carla

Learning more about French cuisine

One of my editors commented on last week’s column about my desire to learn more French cooking. She even gave me a recipe for Beef Bourguigne. Only she spelled it differently. No matter. It still means “beef burgundy.” Which refers to the bottle of red wine you are supposed to cook the beef in. Now, who will I have to pay to go into the liquor store for me to purchase the booze. Just kidding. I’m not such a hypocrite that I can’t buy my own wine.

All this talk of French cooking, however, did remind me that I actually do prepare some French cuisine. I have a crepe pan for making crepes (which are little more than super-thin pancakes); I made quiche for Jim’s lunch just last week; and I make French toast on a regular basis. So, I’m more gourmet than I knew.

While growing up on the farm, I didn’t think I liked French toast. My mother didn’t like me to tell this story, but the reason I didn’t like French toast was she always burned it. And, I guess I thought that was what it was supposed to taste like. In her defense, she was always doing about ten things at the same time and cooking was no exception. Invariably, I

Out Back

Carolyn Plotts



wouldn’t get a piece of toast without it being blackened.

It wasn’t until I was grown and married before I tasted a friend’s French toast and learned how really delicious it could be. Her secret: a little oil, a little sugar, a little vanilla and a little cinnamon mixed in with the eggs and milk. For a special touch, I like to slather it with butter and then sprinkle powdered sugar over the top before serving.

—ob—

Here it is Christmas week and I feel like I’m coasting. All the boxes were sent last week and the candy is effectively gone. A few pieces of fudge and some chocolate-dipped pretzel sticks are all that remain. Jim has requested one more batch of white fudge “just for him.” Perhaps, he hasn’t noticed the caramel corn

is all gone. If he does, he’ll want more of that, too.

The outdoor lights are on timers and I plug in the Christmas tree at night. There is something about the soft glow that immediately lightens your spirit. I almost wish I could keep a tree up year ‘round. But, then it wouldn’t be so special if I saw it every day.

—ob—

Jim’s dad underwent another surgery last week to replace the knee in his one good leg.

We visited him the day after his surgery and he was still a little “out of it.” But, when I caught him winking at me I knew he was on the road to recovery. Jim told him he should try that on the nurses.

—ob—

We plan a quiet day at home this Christmas. Maybe have a neighbor or two come for dinner, but nothing fancy. I think I’ll even use paper plates and take a nap in the afternoon.

I hope you have a lovely Christmas day with your friends and family. And, even though some still say it’s not politically correct, I say, “Merry Christmas.”

Use the gift of memory

Insight

John Schlageck

If I could request but one gift during the holiday season, I’d ask for a book. Books abound with a wealth of knowledge and wisdom. They provide hours of adventure and entertainment rarely found anywhere else in today’s culture.

A couple of books on my present wish list include: “The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse” by Louise Erdrich and “Fall on Your Knees” by Ann-Marie MacDonald. Another book I once read, and pick up to review from time to time, is Howard Thurman’s, “The Mood of Christmas.”

The message in Thurman’s book revolves around a gift he says everyone should enjoy and use in the best way. This gift is memory. Thurman defines memory as, “one of God’s great gifts to the human spirit without which neither life nor experience could have any meaning.” What Thurman urges in his book is to use your

memory now, today and often.

Think what a priceless gift it is. What if you had no memory? Every second, minute and hour of every day would have to begin for the first time. Learning would be impossible and education would be meaningless.

Instead, as people we have the power to store vast amounts of information and experiences throughout our lives. All we have to do is think about it and we can recall these thoughts and experiences on demand with the use of our memory.

Some people store only unpleasant memories. Every slight is filed away. When a later encounter is made with the person responsible for the offense, the individual is chastised again, either

mentally or verbally.

After a period, the memory storehouse is full of unpleasant thoughts. The mind is filled with suspicion, resentment and hate.

For others, only pleasant thoughts are stored for safekeeping. Such thoughts can be summoned at a moment’s notice. They restore faith and re-establish confidence in life at difficult and trying times.

Remember with the coming of the New Year, look to the future with hope — the confident expectation of good. Use the gift of memory to your benefit. Enjoy past experiences and remember life is what you make of it.

Make it good. Happy holidays. John Schlageck is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. Born and raised on a diversified farm in northwestern Kansas, his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.



To...the students and staff of USD 211 for the wonderful Christmas concert Tuesday. It was well enjoyed! (E-mailed)

There is no charge to render a thumbs up; names of those providing the information are not used, only the method of transmission

• Most reasons for thumbs up include recognition to someone for an act of kindness, a group for something special they have undertaken, Grandma’s or Grandpa’s birthday, wedding anniversaries, happy birthdays in general. And you can probably think of some other reasons not listed here.

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