

**Driving
Distraction
Away**

 **SAFESTART[®]**

Driving DISTRACTION Away

“Driving a car is one of the riskiest activities any of us undertake in spite of decades of vehicle design improvements and traffic safety advancements.”

That quote on the left, from the National Safety Council’s president and CEO Deborah Hersman, says it all. Driving is such a big risk factor that it’s the only injury category to receive a full section (it’s 36 pages!) in the National Safety Council’s Injury Facts 2015.

The frequency and potential severity of vehicle collisions places driving in the worst corner of any risk matrix. Add distraction to the mix and driving becomes the riskiest thing we do every day.

The standard picture of distracted driving is a teen with the steering wheel in one hand and a cellphone in the other. But the issue is much bigger—and you won’t solve it unless you shift your focus from driving to distraction.



DISTRACTION, NOT DRIVING, IS THE KEY

The dangers of distraction aren’t confined to the car. There’s almost no difference between distracted driving, distracted working, or doing anything else while distracted. Solve distraction in all its forms and you’ll make people a lot safer.

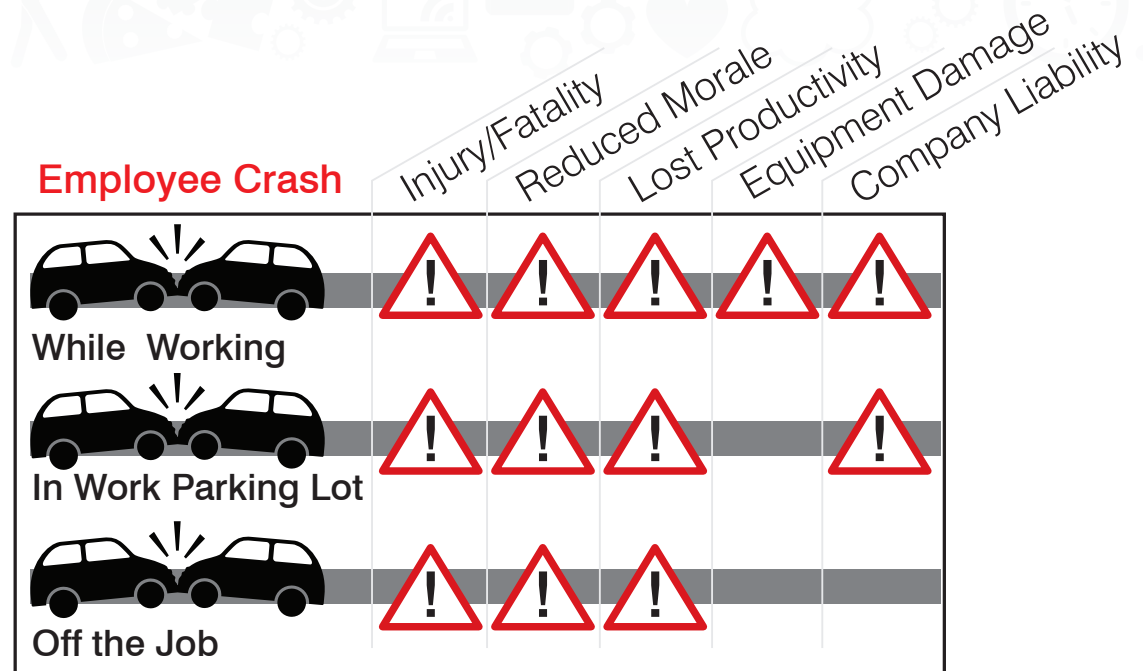
EHS Today, “Motor Vehicle Deaths in 2015 Show Large Increase Year-Over-Year”, February 17, 2016.

Why You Should Care About DISTRACTED DRIVING

Everyone drives or rides in a car. And that means distracted driving affects every single business in the world. Because no matter where a crash occurs—at work or off the job—it can affect drivers, passengers and pedestrians for weeks and months afterwards. And employers pay the price in lost productivity, reduced morale, and injuries to workers...or worse.

Beyond driving, distraction can still lead to costly outcomes—whether it's rushing down stairs or taking focus away from power tools or other hazards.

If you want to keep your people—and profits—safe then you need to see distracted driving as a problem that goes way beyond the workplace.



DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT

There's a huge indirect cost to driving accidents. Your company will save money by reducing distracted driving—and there's a moral imperative to protect workers in any way possible.

Cellphones Are **ONLY PART** of the Problem

Most anti-distraction campaigns feature someone texting from behind the wheel. But data from the Fatality Analysis Reporting System suggests that cellphone use is responsible for only 12% of fatalities caused by distracted driving.

Phones may be the face of distraction but they're hardly the only problem. Distraction comes in many forms:

- the radio, car controls, GPS, looking at street signs, passengers, and unexpected moving objects
- talking with someone else, listening to music, looking at a map
- smoking, eating and drinking
- a wandering mind or being lost in thought.

Distraction isn't a cellphone issue. It's not even a driving issue, really. The real problem is our state of mind that allows us to become distracted in the first place.

BANNING CELLPHONES ISN'T ENOUGH

46 U.S. states and every Canadian province have full or partial cellphone or texting bans.

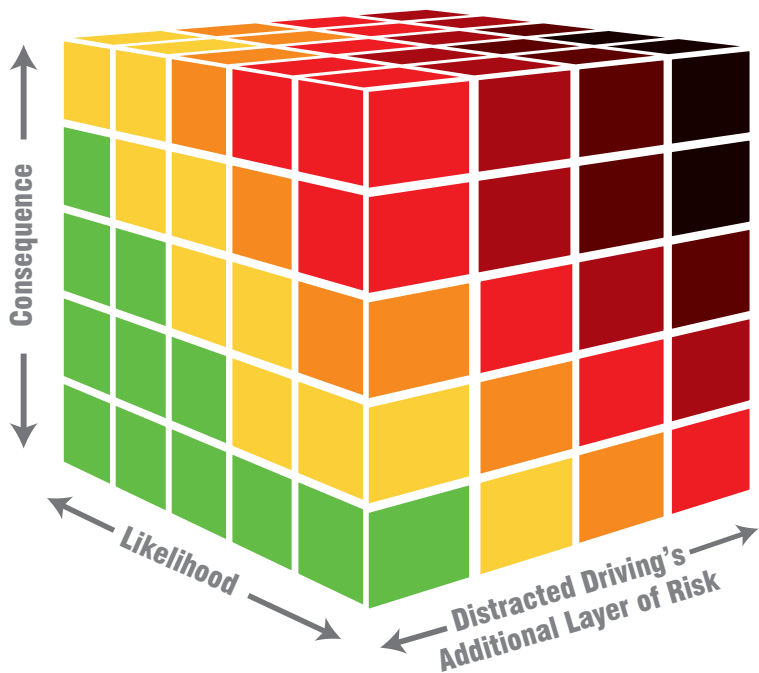
Most companies have some form of anti-cellphone policy in place but the problem is only getting worse.

In the same way that speeding tickets don't eliminate speeding, legislation won't solve cellphone use while driving.

The **THIRD** Dimension of Risk

We've all seen a traditional risk matrix. But there's one thing it doesn't take into account—a driver's state of mind.

		Likelihood				
		Rare	Unlikely	Possible	Likely	Almost Certain
Consequence	Severe	Yellow	Yellow	Orange	Red	Red
	Major	Green	Yellow	Yellow	Orange	Red
	Moderate	Green	Green	Yellow	Yellow	Orange
	Minor	Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Yellow
	Minimal	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green



Distraction is the third dimension of risk. It makes injuries more likely and outcomes potentially worse.

Risk is like a Rubik's Cube. It's easy to solve one side of it. But it's a lot more complicated when you have to deal with all the sides at once—especially when your risk position changes without notice at 100 feet per second.

DEFINING Distracted Driving

Types of Distraction

Decisions

Mental Lapses

A good working definition of driver distraction is “an internal or external factor that takes your eyes or mind away from the road.” In short, it’s anything that takes your focus away from driving.

Driving-related distraction can be organized in two groups:

Conscious distraction. Decisions we make, like reaching for a cellphone or tuning the radio.

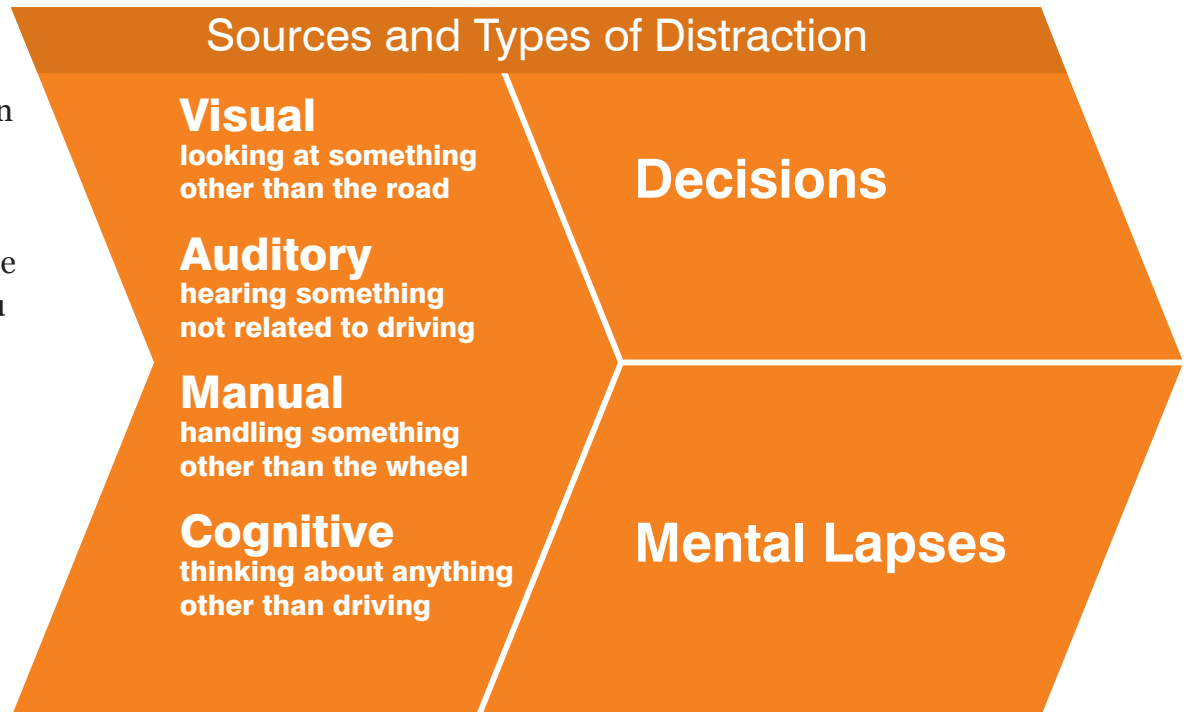
Unintentional distraction. Mental lapses that nobody intends to make, like falling asleep at the wheel or letting their mind wander at a crucial moment.

CAUSES of Distracted Driving

Back up a bit and the four major sources of distracted driving come into view. These four elements contribute to most instances of distraction behind the wheel (and elsewhere too).

These four sources aren't enough to lead to distraction on their own. After all, you don't become distracted every time someone speaks to you or you notice something in the corner of your eye.

So what causes you to become distracted by these things sometimes?



The REAL CAUSES of Distraction

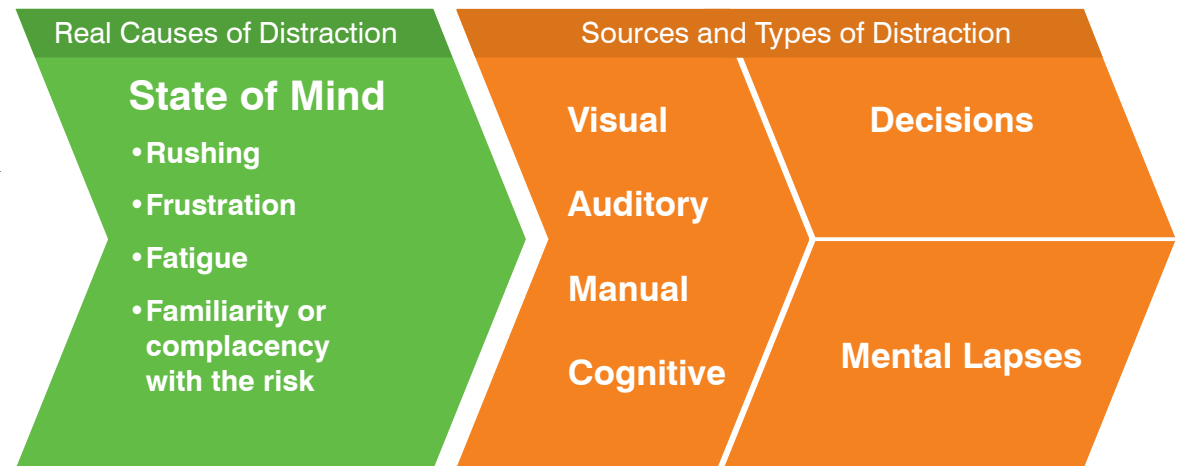
A person's state of mind can make them more vulnerable to the sources of distracted driving:

- When we're rushing, we're more likely to think about why we're in a rush than to concentrate on driving.
- When we're frustrated, we're more likely to get distracted by something we see.
- When we're tired, we're less likely to maintain focus when we hear something unexpected.

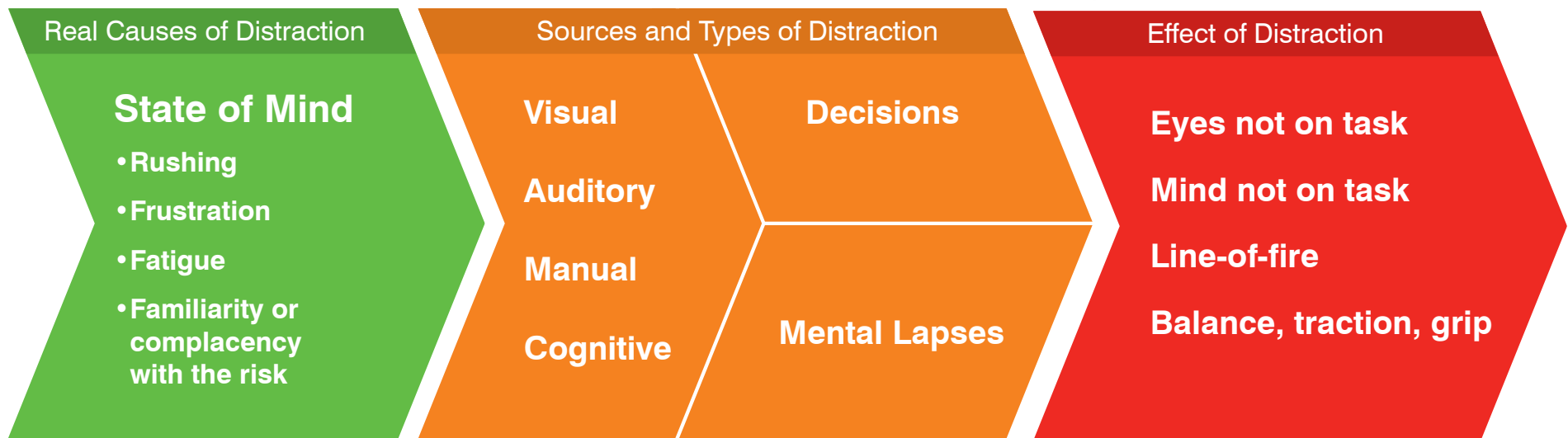
Perhaps the most dangerous cause of distraction is familiarity with the risk.

People take unnecessary risks behind the wheel because they forget driving is incredibly dangerous—steering thousands of pounds of metal traveling at very high speeds.

In a word, they become complacent. And that can lead to a lot of problems.



The COMPLETE PICTURE of Distraction



THE PATTERN OF DISTRACTION IS THE SAME WHETHER WE'RE ON THE ROAD, AT WORK OR AT HOME.

A person's state of mind makes them vulnerable to distraction, and that can lead to poor decisions, mental lapses and a whole bunch of errors. The end result is taking eyes and mind off the task at hand. And then an injury is just a matter of time and luck.

MIND ON TASK, Mental Multitasking and Cognitive Load

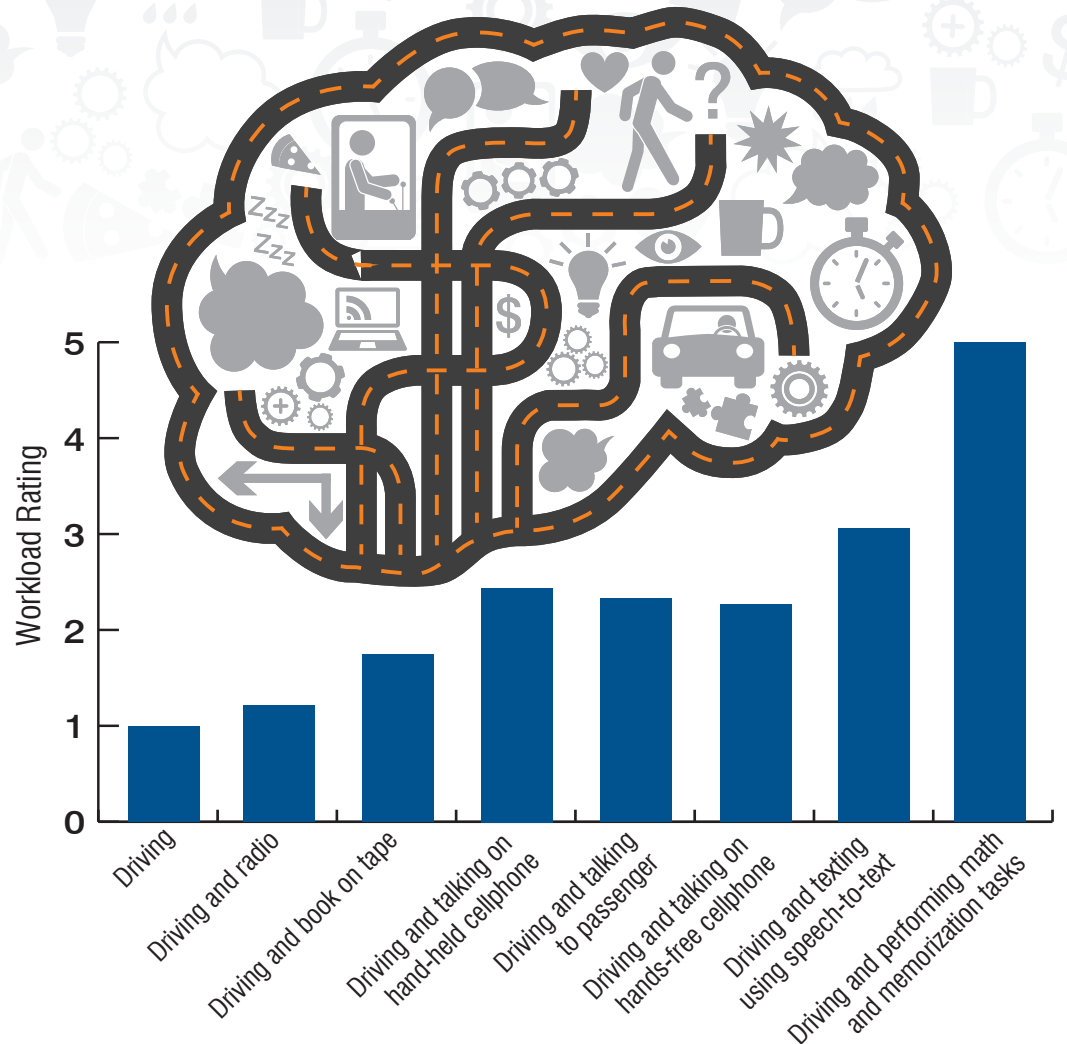
Multitasking is a myth. The human brain can only do one thing at a time—when we “multitask” the brain actually switches rapidly back and forth between the two tasks.

That requires a lot of mental work. And even basic, attentive driving requires numerous different tasks—from steering to monitoring speed to thinking about safe braking distances and looking out for pedestrians and other vehicles.

The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety conducted tests on how much mental capacity different actions require when behind the wheel. You can see the results in the chart on the right.

The study concluded that “increasing the cognitive workload of the in-vehicle secondary tasks resulted in systematic increases in cognitive distraction.”

The more you do—like eating or talking on the phone—the busier your brain is and the less it can focus on driving (or anything else).



“Measuring Cognitive Distraction in the Automobile”, AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, June 2013.

Keeping Workers' EYES and MIND on the Task at Hand



We talked about how “a person’s state of mind can make them more vulnerable to distraction.” Fortunately, a person’s state of mind can make them more resistant to distraction too.

There are three crucial elements to keeping workers’ eyes and mind on the task at hand: **knowledge** of the problem, the **skills** to fight distraction, and **reinforcement** to build strong habits and keep skills and knowledge sharp.

The quickest and most effective way to learn and retain all three elements is to introduce training that provides personal safety and awareness skills as part of your safety program.

SAFESTART®

These four states...

- Rushing
- Frustration
- Fatigue
- Complacency

can cause or contribute to these critical errors...

- Eyes not on Task
- Mind not on Task
- Line-of-Fire
- Balance/Traction/Grip

...which increase the risk of injury.

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Keeping eyes and mind on task is so important that SafeStart makes it one of the primary components of its training. After two decades of training we’ve found it’s still the best way to improve awareness and keep workers safe.

Knowledge

Employees need to understand distraction in practical terms. How does it affect them? What can they do about it?

Here are a few ways to help them better grasp the problem and to truly believe in the risk of distraction.



5 WAYS TO EDUCATE ON DISTRACTION

1. Share the alarming stats, scope of the problem and root causes of distraction as outlined in this guide.
2. Share a personal story of your own about how distraction caused a close call so they can see that even a safety professional is susceptible to distraction-related risk.
3. Ask workers to share a story about when they were driving and had a close call because they momentarily let their eyes or mind drift. This will remind them of how personally susceptible they are to distraction.
4. Disrupt their complacency with the risk. This is especially necessary for activities where the risk and familiarity with the hazard are both high. Get workers to talk about how they would explain the danger level to someone else—like their children.
5. Encourage workers to explain the distraction pattern in their own words. Quiz people on which state of mind (rushing, frustration, fatigue and complacency) or which source of distraction (visual, auditory, manual and cognitive) they think is most likely to cause them problems.

LIMITS OF KNOWLEDGE

Knowing is half the battle. The other half is the ability to act on that knowledge. Provide workers with the personal skills and reinforcement needed to defeat distraction.

Awareness SKILLS

There is always some sort of distraction nearby. People need the skills to maintain focus when the risk of distraction is compounded by their state of mind (rushing, frustration, fatigue and complacency) and amount of hazardous energy (walking vs. driving).

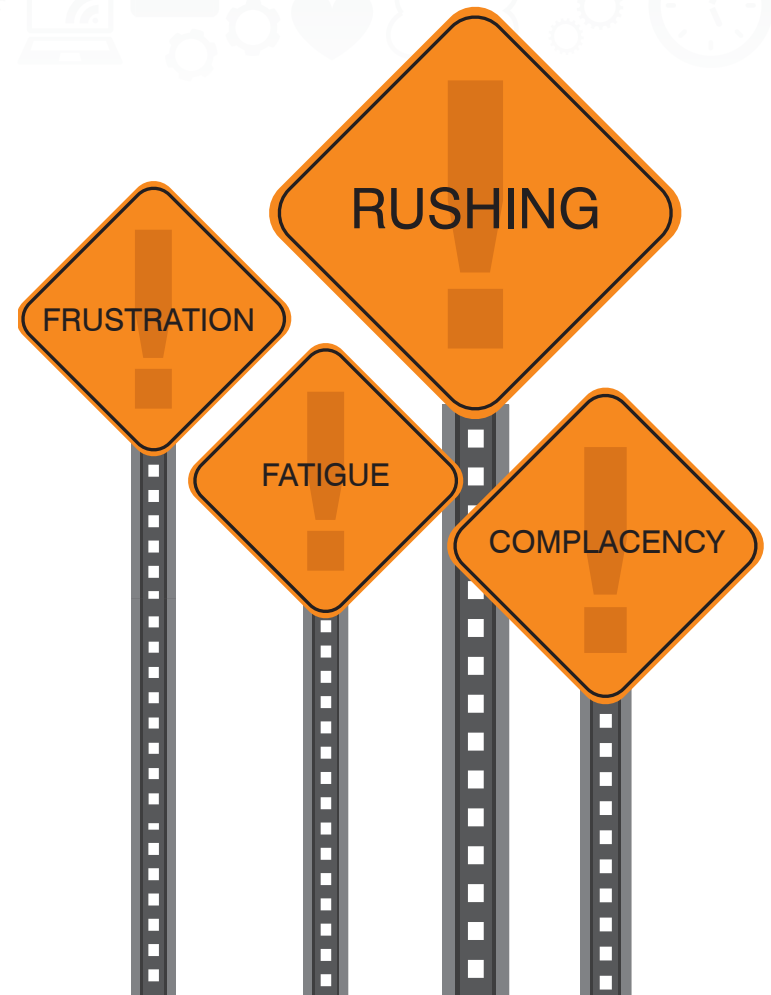
People can recognize the physical symptoms of these states fairly easily:

- increased heart rate and feeling frantic = rushing
- feeling flushed or like your “blood is boiling” = frustration
- yawning, dragging feet, or feeling lethargic = fatigued

But few people are able to take effective action when they notice these signs. That’s because most of us focus more on the problem than on how to deal with it.

Complacency is also a factor. Someone might notice they’re tired and, even though they know there’s an increased risk they’ll fall asleep, they choose to drive anyway because they’ve done it numerous times before without incident.

Workers need the skills to recognize when they’re rushing or fatigued...and they also have to know what to do about it.



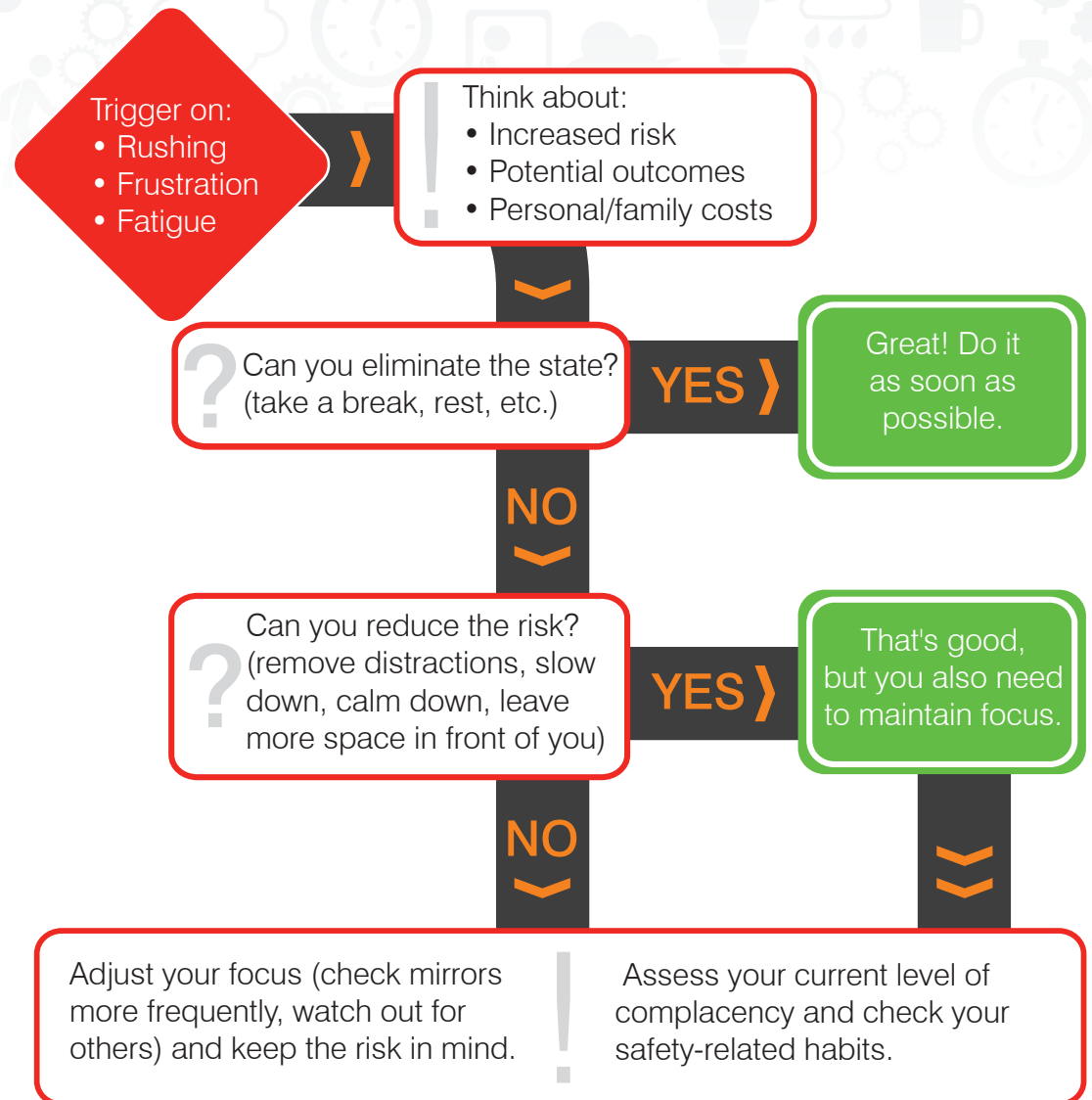
Skills in ACTION

Discuss how to respond in certain situations by using “if-then” scenarios. This type of verbal planning is an easy and effective way to prepare employees for dealing with these states when they occur.

Ask employees which state they might encounter and ask them to explain what they’ll do to reduce it. Examples include:

- “If I notice I’m rushing to get somewhere then I’ll think to myself that it’s not worth the extra risk, and go at a normal pace.”
- “If I start to feel frustrated with other drivers then I’ll take a deep breath and try to cool off.”
- “If I catch myself yawning then I’ll remind myself to stay extra-focused and not take any extra risks to compensate for my fatigue.”

The signs of complacency can be harder to recognize in the moment. This makes it especially important to reinforce the knowledge, habits and rules that reduce the risk of mental lapses and poor decisions.



The 3 Keys to REINFORCEMENT

REPETITION

Practice makes perfect. Repetition is the key to learning almost anything—including how to avoid distraction. But don't repeat the same thing over and over. Mix up the format, put a new spin on it, or place it in a new context. The goal is to get people to see and practice the same concepts (like dealing with distraction while driving) from different angles.

MOTIVATION

The most effective motivations are personal to each employee—providing for their family, keeping their kids safe, taking a trip they've always dreamed of. Getting hurt can ruin all of that. Help them see how distraction can affect the things they love and discuss how modeling good distraction-fighting behavior will show their kids how to be safer when they grow up and start driving.

HABITS

Researchers at the University of Southern California discovered that people are more likely to behave according to routines and habits during times of stress. Instilling safe habits and risk-reducing behavioral patterns can compensate for complacency.

University of Southern California. (2013), Healthy habits die hard: In times of stress, people lean on established routines—even healthy ones. ScienceDaily

SUMMARY

- To solve distraction, you need training like SafeStart to address human error by providing practical knowledge and skills training, and reinforcement of safe habits and behavior.
- To prevent becoming distracted, people need the skills to take action when they notice they're rushing, frustrated, fatigued or complacent.
- Complacency can be extra-difficult to deal with. Disrupt familiarity with the risk of distraction through constant discussions and storytelling. Building strong habits can provide a fallback for when complacency strikes.
- The key to solving distracted driving is to address distraction in totality. The pattern of distraction is the same whether you're driving, at work or doing something else entirely. Focus on empowering people to defeat distraction everywhere it occurs: at work, at home and on the road.



LEARN MORE

We hope that you found this guide helpful. For more insight into a variety of safety problems—and their potential solutions—check out our collection of on-demand webinars

safestart.com/webinars

SHARE THIS GUIDE

Distracted driving—and distraction in general—affects everyone. If you found this guide informative please share it with others.

About SafeStart

SafeStart is a safety company dedicated to reducing preventable deaths and injuries both on and off the job by making human factors more understandable, safety training more personable, and giving organizations around the world a more engaging and useful approach to keeping people safe.



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