

May 3, 2005

Dr. Jeffrey Runge, Administrator  
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration  
400 Seventh Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Dr. Runge,

We're writing to alert you to new research findings on driver distraction recently published in *Human Factors*, the Journal of the Human Factors and Ergonomics Society (enclosed). The Society's mission is to promote the discovery and exchange of knowledge concerning the characteristics of human beings that are applicable to the design of systems and devices of all kinds. As such the Society membership is comprised of a broad mixture of social and behavioral scientists, ergonomists, and engineers who also belong to, or are represented by, larger groups including the American Psychological Association, The Federation of Behavioral, Psychological and Cognitive Sciences, and the Consortium of Social Science Associations.

Over the past year, driver distraction research has received a great deal of press, sadly in part, because of a cluster of fatalities involving adolescent drivers in the Mid-Atlantic States. Those tragedies, coupled to emerging research on risk-taking behavior and the maturation of the adolescent brain, have resulted in new legislation regulating cell phone use and restricting passengers for younger drivers. While driver distraction appears to be particularly dangerous for our youth, it is a public health hazard without age barriers that is grossly misunderstood by both the public and our policy makers. Contrary to popular belief, the latest research indicates that the hazard extends well beyond cell phones and young drivers, and promises to increase dramatically with the technology-driven growth in cognitive demands.

Innovations that afford drivers an ever-expanding array of information-handling options continue to come on line, and are marketed heavily. Each, considered alone, is potentially helpful. However, the collective demand on the operator's limited cognitive capacity as the number and functionality of these devices increases quickly becomes problematic. We believe it is critical that emerging scientific data be used to formulate public policies that will enhance public safety in this new environment--before, rather than after, the situation becomes virtually irreversible. It is our hope that this confluence of forces including political support, public concern, and most importantly our enhanced scientific understanding of cognitive load and its relationship to driver distraction, will help guide NHTSA's programmatic initiatives and policies. We look forward to working with you to enhance public understanding of driver distraction research as well as in your efforts to mitigate its consequences.

If you have questions or would like further information, please contact Geoff Mumford, Director of Science Policy, American Psychological Association, by phone at (202) 336-6067 or by email at gmumford@apa.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Norman B. Anderson", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Norman B. Anderson, Ph.D.  
Chief Executive Officer, American Psychological Association

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Howard J. Silver", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Howard J. Silver, Ph.D.  
Executive Director, Consortium of Social Science Associations

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Barbara A. Wanchisen", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Barbara A. Wanchisen, Ph.D.  
Executive Director, The Federation of Behavioral, Psychological, & Cognitive Sciences

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Wendy A. Rogers", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Wendy A. Rogers, Ph.D.  
President, Human Factors and Ergonomics Society