

# ★ ★ ★ ★ Safety Culture

## 2009 Traffic Safety Culture Index

### The Problem

- More than 1 million people have died in motor vehicle crashes in the last 25 years in the United States, including 37,261 last year.
  - Despite this being the fewest deaths caused by crashes in a single year since 1961, this still represents over 100 needless deaths every day.
- Society appears to have grown complacent—accepting these deaths and injuries.
- We need a stronger culture of traffic safety where individuals take responsibility for their own safety and the safety of others.

### Purpose of the Index

- To investigate the public's traffic-safety-related knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, and experiences.
- To monitor America's traffic safety culture.
- To guide traffic safety research and public outreach.
- To foster dialogue about traffic safety and how to improve it.

### Findings

- 35% of drivers report that driving feels less safe today than it did five years ago.<sup>1</sup>
  - Distracted driving, mentioned by 31%, was the most often cited reason.
  - Other major reasons that respondents mentioned for feeling less safe driving today than five years ago included aggressive driving and/or road rage (20%) and speeding (15%).
- When asked about their driving behavior in the past month:<sup>2</sup>
  - 67% of drivers reported talking on the cell phone while driving; including 28% who reported doing so fairly often or regularly.
  - 44% reported speeding 15 mph over the speed limit on freeways.
  - 29% reported driving through a light that had already turned red even though they could have stopped safely.
  - 27% reported tailgating another driver when they could have backed off.
  - 24% reported speeding 15 mph over the speed limit on residential streets.
  - 21% of drivers reported text messaging while driving.

<sup>1</sup> Question: *Over all, do you think driving feels safer, less safe, or about the same as it did five years ago?*

<sup>2</sup> Question: *In the past 30 days, how often have you [talked on your cell phone while you were driving / read or sent a text message or email while you were driving / driven 15 mph over the speed limit on a freeway / driven through a light that had just turned red when you could have stopped safely / tailgated another driver when you could have backed off / driven 15 mph over the speed limit on a residential street]? Have you done that regularly, fairly often, rarely, just once, or never?*



Car crashes rank among the leading causes of death in the United States.

- When asked about perceived threats to their safety:<sup>3</sup>
  - 90% rated people driving after drinking alcohol as a very serious threat to their safety.
  - 87% rated drivers text messaging or emailing as a very serious threat.
  - 79% rated drivers not paying attention as a very serious threat.
  - 70% rated aggressive driving as a very serious threat.
  - 58% rated drivers talking on cell phones as a very serious threat.
  - 56% rated speeding as a very serious threat.
- When asked how acceptable they considered it to be for a driver to engage in various behaviors while driving, large majorities rated the behaviors as unacceptable, even after having already admitted to doing those things themselves.<sup>4</sup> For example:
  - 95% of drivers said that text messaging while driving was completely or somewhat unacceptable; 18% of those same drivers admitted having read or sent a text message or email while driving in the past month.
  - 94% rated running red lights as unacceptable; 26% of those same drivers admitted having run a red light when they could have stopped safely.
  - 91% rated tailgating as unacceptable; 24% of those same drivers admitted having tailgated another driver when they could have backed off.
  - 95% rated driving 15 mph over the speed limit on a residential street as unacceptable; 21% of those same drivers admitted having done this.
  - 71% rated talking on a handheld cell phone while driving as unacceptable, yet 30% of those same drivers reported doing this, and another 27% reported using a hands-free phone, which studies have shown is no safer.
  - 63% rated driving 15 mph over the speed limit on a freeway as unacceptable; 28% of those same drivers reported having done this.

### About the Index

The AAA Foundation commissioned Abt SRBI Inc. to conduct a random sample telephone survey of the American public telephone survey of 2,501 U.S. residents 16 years of age and older, in English and in Spanish, via landline and cellular telephone, from April 15, 2009 through May 12, 2009.

*Statistics based on the full sample have a margin of error of plus or minus approximately 2.5 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. Statistics reported in this fact sheet have a margin of error of between 2.4 and 4.1 percentage points.*

*Note that the margin of error reflects only the level of confidence that the responses of a random sample of respondents are statistically representative of the responses that would have been obtained if the entire population were to have been interviewed over the same time period, by the same interviewers, using the same questionnaire. It does not reflect errors related to systematic non-coverage of certain segments of the population, non-response, interviewer errors, or differences in understanding of survey questions or response options.*

<sup>3</sup> Question: *Do you feel [drivers not paying attention / drivers talking on cell phones / drivers text messaging or emailing / people driving after drinking alcohol / people driving aggressively / people driving well over the speed limit] are a very serious threat, a somewhat serious threat, a minor threat, or not a threat to your personal safety?*

<sup>4</sup> Question: *How acceptable do you, personally, consider it to be for a driver to [send text messages or emails while driving / drive through a light that had just turned red when they could have stopped safely / tailgate a slow driver when there is not room to pass / drive 15 mph over the speed limit on a residential street / talk on a handheld cell phone / drive 15 mph over the speed limit on a freeway]?*

**Question:** Overall, do you think driving feels safer, less safe, or about the same as it did five years ago?

Weighted Percent of Valid Responses	
<b>Safer</b>	12.0%
<b>About the Same</b>	53.0%
<b>Less Safe</b>	35.0%
Number of Responses	
<b>Valid Responses</b>	2,088
<b>Don't Know / Refused</b>	53
<b>Total Responses</b>	2,141

**Question:** *Why do you say that?\**

	Weighted Percent of Respondents**
<b>Distracted Driving</b>	30.6%
<b>Speed / Speeding</b>	15.1%
<b>Aggressive Driving and/or Road Rage</b>	20.2%
<b>Alcohol / Drugs</b>	6.8%
<b>Vehicle Safety Issues (All)</b>	22.1%
<b>Road (Infrastructure) Safety Issues (All)</b>	12.7%
<b>All Other Responses</b>	30.2%
<b>Number of Respondents</b>	
<b>One or More Valid Responses</b>	726
<b>Don't Know / Refused</b>	5
<b>Total Respondents</b>	731

\* Base: Respondents who indicated driving feels less safe than it did five years ago (see previous question)

\*\* Open-ended question, responses coded by interviewers into categories shown. Multiple responses were allowed; interviewers coded up to three responses for each respondent. Percents shown are percent of respondents who provided each response, not percent of responses, thus percents do not add to 100%.

**Question:** Do you feel [ITEM] are a very serious threat, a somewhat serious threat, a minor threat, or not a threat to your personal safety?

	Very Serious Threat	Somewhat Serious Threat	Minor Threat	Not a Threat	Valid Responses	Don't Know / Refused	Total Responses
	Weighted Percent of Valid Responses				Number of Responses		
<i>Drivers talking on cell phones</i>	57.8%	33.7%	7.3%	1.2%	2,125	16	2,141
<i>Drivers text messaging or emailing</i>	87.5%	10.2%	1.8%	0.5%	1,059	8	1,067
<i>Drivers not paying attention</i>	79.4%	17.8%	1.9%	0.9%	1,029	1	1,030
<i>People driving aggressively</i>	70.0%	25.7%	3.6%	0.8%	2,132	9	2,141
<i>People driving well over the speed limit</i>	55.6%	34.1%	8.6%	1.7%	2,122	19	2,141
<i>People driving after drinking alcohol</i>	89.6%	7.6%	2.7%	0.1%	1,090	7	1,097

**Question:** *In the past 30 days, how often have you \_\_\_\_? Have you done that regularly, fairly often, rarely, just once, or never?*

	Never	Just Once	Rarely	Fairly Often	Regularly	Valid Responses	Don't Know / Refused	Total Responses
	Weighted Percent of Valid Responses					Number of Responses		
<i>Talked on your cell phone while you were driving</i>	32.6%	8.9%	30.2%	15.9%	12.4%	2,126	15	2,141
<i>Read or sent a text message or email while you were driving</i>	79.0%	4.2%	10.5%	4.3%	2.0%	2,132	9	2,141
<i>Driven 15 miles per hour over the speed limit on a freeway</i>	56.2%	5.1%	23.5%	9.0%	6.2%	2,123	18	2,141
<i>Driven 15 miles per hour over the speed limit on a residential street</i>	76.0%	4.4%	15.5%	2.8%	1.3%	2,128	13	2,141
<i>Driven through a light that had just turned red, when you could have stopped safely</i>	70.7%	10.6%	16.1%	1.8%	0.9%	2,133	8	2,141
<i>Tailgated another driver when you could have backed off</i>	72.5%	6.0%	17.1%	2.7%	1.7%	2,127	14	2,141

**Question:** *How acceptable do you, personally, consider it to be for a driver to \_\_\_\_? Do you consider that to be completely acceptable, somewhat acceptable, somewhat unacceptable, or completely unacceptable?*

	Completely Unacceptable	Somewhat Unacceptable	Neither (Volunteered)	Somewhat Acceptable	Completely Acceptable	Valid Responses	Don't Know / Refused	Total Responses
	Weighted Percent of Valid Responses					Number of Responses		
<i>Talk on a handheld cell phone while driving</i>	46.1%	24.9%	0.2%	24.9%	3.8%	2,121	20	2,141
<i>Send text messages or emails while driving</i>	81.7%	13.0%	0.0%	4.9%	0.4%	1,027	7	1,034
<i>Drive 15 miles per hour over the speed limit on a freeway</i>	39.6%	23.0%	0.3%	30.6%	6.6%	2,120	21	2,141
<i>Drive 15 miles per hour over the speed limit on a residential street</i>	81.3%	13.1%	0.2%	4.4%	1.0%	2,135	6	2,141
<i>Drive through a light that had just turned red, when they could have stopped safely</i>	77.0%	16.8%	0.0%	5.2%	1.1%	1,105	3	1,108
<i>Tailgate a slow driver if there is not room to pass</i>	70.9%	20.3%	0.0%	7.3%	1.5%	1,110	10	1,120