

## **DANGERS OF WALKING DISTRACTED**

You have seen the videos of people walking into swimming pools, lamp posts, bus stops, fountains, flower displays, falling down stairs, tripping over curbs, stepping into traffic all while absorbed in using an electronic device. When you saw such actions you may have even chuckled a little at their inability to see what was coming, however, walking while distracted is not a laughing matter. A new study from William Paterson University found that distracted walking caused by walking while using electronic services leads to significant risk of injury.

During the study of 21,000 pedestrians at a very busy Manhattan intersection, nearly half crossed on a “Don’t Walk” signal and nearly 1/3 of pedestrians crossing on a “Walk” signal were wearing headphones, talking on a mobile phone, and/or looking down at an electronic device. The most prevalent distracted behavior, according to the study, was headphone use, which impaired the “ability to register important audible warnings.”

The study results were surprising in that there were so many pedestrians distracted by technology during the walk signal, but the fact that they were even more distracted by technology crossing on a “Don’t Walk” signal is astonishing.

The study showed a clear public health concern because that particular intersection was incredibly busy and singled out as being dangerous.

Some doctors and safety experts are increasingly concerned about pedestrians and note that deaths and injuries are becoming more common. Pedestrian injury rates have increased by 25% over the past five years among teenagers ages 16 to 19, with that age group accounting for about half of all pedestrian deaths among children and adolescents.

A recent report from the governor’s National Highway Traffic Safety Administration found about 69,000 pedestrians are hurt each year, 11,000 of whom are younger than 14 years of age. About 4,400 of the injuries were fatal.

Researchers recorded intersections at 68 schools in 17 states, where they observed more than 34,000 students crossing the street. They found about one in five high school students were distracted by an electronic device when crossing. So too were about one in eight middle school students. (Reported by Safe Kids)

## WHAT CITIES HAVE DONE TO PREVENT DISTRACTED WALKING:

- experimented with fines
- attempted creating new laws
- awarded grants for safety programs
- changed streets to pedestrian walk ways
- lowered speed limits
- created special walking lanes
- posted warning signs on streets and public places

Unfortunately, emergency rooms continue to see patients injured because of distracted walking. One ER doctor states “texting is the most dangerous thing to do on foot.”

The American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons (AAOS) in its public service campaign refers to pedestrians engaged in and with electronic devices as “Digital Deadwalkers.”

## RECOMMENDED SAFETY TIPS BY THE AAOS:

- If you must use headphones or other electronic devices, maintain a volume that allows you to hear the sounds of traffic and your surroundings.
- While you walk, focus on the people, objects and obstacles around you.
- Don't jaywalk.
- Cross streets carefully, preferably at a traffic light, remaining cognizant of the pedestrian traffic flow and the cars and bikes in and near the road.
- If you need to talk to a child or the person next to you, make a phone call, text or other action that could distract you from the goal of getting where you need to go safely, stop and do so away from the pedestrian traffic flow.

## REFERENCES, RESOURCES TO CONTACT, & ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons  
(<http://orthoinfo.aaos.org/topic.cfm?topic=A00748>)
- Distracted Walking: Danger on the Crosswalk  
(<http://www.libertymutual.com/safe-and-smart-living/blog-posts/pedestrian-safety>)
- Headphone Use and Pedestrian Injury and Death  
(<http://injuryprevention.bmj.com/content/18/5/287>)
- Distracted Walking: Injuries Soar for Pedestrians on Phones  
(<http://researchnews.osu.edu/archive/distractwalk.htm>)
- National Highway Transportation Safety Administration: Everyone Is a Pedestrian  
(<http://www.nhtsa.gov/Pedestrians>)