

Cell phone use by drivers

In a survey of over 37,000 drivers carried out in June, 1.3% had a cell phone held up to their head and a further 2% were probably texting.

Survey

In June 2013 the Ministry commissioned a survey of hand-held cell phone use by drivers of cars and vans at 52 sites around New Zealand.

Handheld cell phone use by drivers was observed by surveyors standing on the roadside. Survey sites were spread across 7 urban centres and one rural town. Surveys were carried out during daylight hours on weekdays throughout June. Most surveys were situated where traffic had to slow, for example approaching an intersection. In some cases vehicles stopped in a queue were surveyed.

This was a pilot study designed to provide a snapshot of driver cell phone use. It was not designed to measure national rates across all times of the day and week.

Two categories of cell phone use were recorded; phone held to head and probably texting. 'Probably texting' was recorded when the driver was seen to be operating a hand held device in a manner that could be texting. Texting can be difficult to determine. A phone may be held out of sight or alternatively the device held may not be a phone (eg music player). No attempt was made to identify the use of hands-free cell phone use.

Results

Location

Overall, 1.3% had a cell phone held up to their head and a further 2% were probably texting. Wellington had the highest phone to head rate (1.7%) while the highest texting rate was in Auckland (3.8%). Cell phone use by drivers in the rural town was lower than that in any of the urban centres.

Hand-held cell phone use by location

Area	Total Surveyed	Phone to head	Probably texting
Auckland	14274	1.2%	3.8%
Hamilton	2001	1.0%	1.8%
Tauranga	2225	1.2%	0.8%
Napier/Hastings	1943	1.1%	0.7%
Wellington	9729	1.7%	1.2%
Christchurch	4200	1.2%	0.6%
Dunedin	2218	0.8%	0.7%
Rural (Manawatu)	1103	0.5%	0.0%
Total	37693	1.3%	2.0%

Moving and stationary vehicles

The use of cell phones for texting is more prevalent for stationary vehicles (4.4%) than moving vehicles (1.3%). For Auckland the texting rate for stationary vehicles is 5.9% compared to 2.4% for moving vehicles. There is little difference in the phone-to-head use of cell phones between stationary and moving vehicles.

Hand-held cell phone use for stationary and moving vehicles

Stationary/Moving	Total surveyed	Phone to head	Probably texting
Stationary	8612	1.1%	4.4%
Moving	29081	1.3%	1.3%
Total	37693	1.3%	2.0%

Time of day

In the 3 main centres surveys were done in 3 time slots; morning (8-9am), afternoon (3-4pm) and late afternoon (4-5pm). Overall there is little difference between the 3 time slots and no consistent patterns across the 3 cities.

Hand-held cell phone use by time of day

Area	Total Surveyed	Phone to head	Probably texting
Auckland			
Morning (8-9am)	4756	0.9%	4.0%
Afternoon (3-4pm)	4758	1.2%	3.6%
Late afternoon (4-5pm)	4760	1.4%	3.8%
Total	14274	1.2%	3.8%
Wellington			
Morning (8-9am)	3297	1.9%	1.1%
Afternoon (3-4pm)	3223	1.9%	1.1%
Late afternoon (4-5pm)	3209	1.4%	1.3%
Total	9729	1.7%	1.2%
Christchurch			
Morning (8-9am)	1400	1.4%	0.9%
Afternoon (3-4pm)	1400	0.7%	0.4%
Late afternoon (4-5pm)	1400	1.6%	0.4%
Total	4200	1.2%	0.6%
Total			
Morning (8-9am)	9453	1.3%	2.5%
Afternoon (3-4pm)	9381	1.3%	2.2%
Late afternoon (4-5pm)	9369	1.4%	2.4%
Total	28203	1.4%	2.4%

Note

This type of survey identifies how many drivers are using a cell phone at the time they pass the survey point. The percentage of drivers who ever use a hand-held cell phone while driving will be considerably higher than the results of this survey.