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N.J. drivers continue to roll the dice with safety

Despite understanding the consequences, New Jersey drivers continue to speed and engage in other unsafe behaviors, according to a recent study by Fairleigh Dickinson University's PublicMind™, co-sponsored by the state's Division of Highway Traffic Safety.

Overall, 1 in 3 (32%) Garden State drivers say they drive 70 mph on the highway "most of the time" or "often", up from 25 percent in 2011. Drivers with long commutes - over 20 miles (38%); and the youngest drivers - those under 30 (37%) are most likely to speed.

Not surprisingly, those who report frequently driving fast are twice as likely to have received a speeding ticket in the past 3 years as those who report speeding "just once in a while" or "never" (10% vs. 5%). Despite the results, drivers are aware of the potential to be ticketed for such risky behaviors. Overall, 8 in 10 (80%) believe they are "very likely" or "somewhat likely" to get a ticket for speeding.

"It is disappointing that despite all that has been done in the state and people's awareness of the risks, that so many individuals continue to drive at dangerous speeds," said Dan Cassino, a professor Political Science at Fairleigh Dickinson and the principal investigator of the survey.

Texting while driving has decreased from 25% in 2011 to 19% in 2012. However, the youngest drivers, despite texting less than in 2011, continue to do so at rates (48%) much higher than all other age groups (34%, 20% and 3%, respectively). "Forty-eight percent is an improvement," said Cassino, "but the fact that half of the least experienced drivers are still texting while driving is terrifying. It looks like outreach programs have been working, but they're not yet enough."

Their understanding regarding the legality of texting while driving might be part of the problem. Fifteen percent of drivers under 30 think that it's legal, compared to just two percent of drivers overall. Most drivers (85%) know that texting while driving is illegal, but they're split on whether the current penalties are enough to stop the practice. Fifty-two percent say that the current fine of \$100 is enough to dissuade them but 43 percent say that it isn't enough to stop them personally from texting. "Even though they know it's illegal, fewer than half think they will get pulled over for texting," said Cassino. "Thirty-four percent of all respondents tell us that they frequently see other people texting behind the wheel, and see no reason why they should be the one to get ticketed for it."

On the positive side, most (91%) report wearing a seatbelt while driving, a figure that remains virtually unchanged from 2011 (90%). Those with the longest commutes are equally as likely to wear seatbelts while driving (93%), however, it's again the youngest drivers (83%) and those who frequently speed (85%) who are the least likely to wear seatbelts.

Three-in-five (60%) think they are 'very likely' or 'somewhat likely' to be ticketed for not wearing a seat belt while driving.

This year's study found a decrease in the use of handheld phones while driving. Only nine percent of drivers admit to using a handheld phone behind the wheel regularly, down from 26 percent just five years ago. Despite these low figures, however, most (72%) report they see others talking on a hand held cellphone 'very often'. Although most (95%) know it is illegal to talk into a hand held cell phone while driving, young drivers are not as knowledgeable of the law, as one-in-ten (11%) believe it is legal.

Young drivers (17%), those with long commutes (15%), and speeders (15%) are the most likely to report talking on a hand held cell phone 'most of the time' or 'often'. Among all drivers, those who report talking on a hand held cell phone are a third more likely (16%) to have been in an accident than those who do not (12%). Once again, only half (54%) of all respondents believe it is very or somewhat likely they will be ticketed for talking on a hand held cell phone while driving.

"For New Jersey drivers, speeding, texting and long commutes are all related behaviors," said Cassino. "There seem to be two big clusters of risky drivers in New Jersey: young drivers, and older, more educated drivers with long commutes. Together, these groups constitute the majority (about 62%) of the accidents and tickets in the state."

Despite all of this, New Jersey drivers think pretty highly of themselves. Seventy-two percent of drivers in the state rate themselves as being above average, and only one percent evaluates themselves worse than the average driver. The real problem, according to them, is people from New York. Fifty-two percent of New Jersey drivers say that drivers from the Empire State are the worst of those in neighboring states, with 15 percent each naming Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

"Drivers who go fast think they're more skilled than other drivers; drivers who go slow think that they're more careful," said Cassino. "Pretty much everyone thinks that they're above average, and so they can get away with talking on the phone, speeding or texting."

The Fairleigh Dickinson University survey was co-sponsored by the New Jersey Division of Highway Traffic Safety and carried out by telephone from April 14, 2012, to May 17, 2012 using a randomly selected sample of 1,001 New Jersey residents aged 17 and over who report they drive regularly, including an oversample of drivers under the age of 30. It has a margin of error of +/-3 percentage points.

Background Memo and Tables

This study was conducted by Fairleigh Dickinson University's PublicMind and co-sponsored by the New Jersey Division of Highway Traffic Safety. The survey was conducted by telephone from April 14 through May 17, using a randomly selected sample of 1,001 New Jersey residents aged 17 and over who report they drive regularly, including an oversample of drivers under the age of 30. The sampling error for 1,001 randomly selected respondents in a statewide survey is +/-3 percentage points at the 95 percent level of confidence. Survey results are also subject to non-sampling error. The margin of error for subgroups is larger and varies by the size of that subgroup. Survey results are also subject to non-sampling error. This kind of error, which cannot be measured, arises from a number of factors including, but not limited to, non-response (eligible individuals refusing to be interviewed), question wording, the order in which questions are asked, and variations among interviewers. PublicMind interviews are conducted by Opinion America of Cedar Knolls, NJ, with professionally trained interviewers using a CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) system. Random selection is achieved by computerized random-digit dialing. This technique gives every person with a land-line phone number (including those with unlisted numbers) an equal chance of being selected. The total combined sample is mathematically weighted to match known demographics of age, race and gender among the general population.

When you're driving on a New Jersey highway, how often would you say you drive over 70 miles an hour?												
	All	2011	2010	Men	Women	Age				Commute		
						17-29	30-44	45-60	60+	None	<20	20+
Most of the time	15	10	12	16	9	22	21	15	7	8	14	21
Often	17	15	11	14	13	15	14	15	10	17	17	17
Just once in a while	46	40	44	49	44	48	44	46	49	50	47	43
Never	21	34	32	20	32	15	19	23	33	23	22	19
Don't Know	1	1	1	0	1	0	2	0	0	2	1	0

In the past three years have you personally, received a speeding ticket?									
	All	2011	2010	2009	2008	Men	Women	Over 70	
								Most of the time/Often	Once in a while/Never
Yes	7	10	9	11	9	10	4	10	5
No	93	90	91	89	90	90	96	89	95
Don't Know/Don't	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0

And what do you think the chances are of getting a ticket if you drive over the speed limit?									
	All	2011	2010	Men	Women	Drive over 70		Education	
						Most of the time/Often	Once in a while/Never	HS or less	College Plus
Very Likely	30	33	30	28	31	21	32	34	28
Somewhat Likely	50	50	48	50	50	57	48	44	52
Not Very Likely	12	10	15	14	10	14	11	11	12
Not Likely at All	5	4	5	5	6	5	6	7	5
Don't Know	4	3	3	3	4	3	3	4	3

In the past three years have you personally, sent a text message while driving?										
	All	2011	2010	2009	2008	Length of Commute			Drives Over 70	
						Doesn't Drive	0-19 M	20+ M	Most of the time/Often	Rarely/ Never
Yes	19	25	25	21	15	22	28	31	36	13
No	81	75	75	79	84	78	72	69	63	87
Don't Know/ Don't Remember	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0

In the past three years have you personally, sent a text message while driving?										
	17-29					30-44				
	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008
Yes	48	64	56	57	51	34	35	37	28	20
No	50	36	43	43	49	65	65	63	72	80
Don't Know / Don't Remember	2	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
	45-60					60+				
	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008
Yes	20	15	17	12	7	3	2	1	1	1
No	80	85	83	87	92	97	98	98	99	98
Don't Know / Don't Remember	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	1

Under the current New Jersey law, is it legal or illegal to send a text message while driving?							
	All	Age				Sent a text message	
		17-29	30-44	45-60	60+	Yes	No
Legal	2	15	1	3	1	4	2
Illegal	85	80	90	87	82	87	84
Not Sure	13	4	9	10	17	9	14

Currently in NJ you can get a \$100 ticket for talking on a hand held cell phone, or texting while driving. Is that fine high enough to discourage you from doing so?									
	All	Age				Sent a text message		Hand Held Phone	
		17-29	30-44	45-60	60+	Yes	No	Most	Rarely/ Never
Yes	52	72	52	53	47	58	51	53	53
No	43	28	44	43	47	41	44	44	43
Not Sure	4	0	4	4	4	1	4	2	4
Refused	1	0	1	0	2	0	1	0	1

What do you think the chances are of getting a ticket if you send a text message while driving?									
	All	Age				Education		More than 70	
		17-29	30-44	45-60	60+	HS or less	College +	Most of the time/ Often	Once in a while/ Never
Very Likely	18	31	24	18	18	23	17	12	20
Somewhat Likely	28	28	33	27	26	33	27	25	29
Not Very Likely	29	28	30	30	28	23	31	40	25
Not Likely at All	19	12	12	19	21	16	20	20	19
Don't Know	6	0	0	6	7	6	6	3	6

How often do you see people driving a car while they are also texting?									
	All	2011	Age				Length of Commute		
			17-29	30-44	45-60	60+	Doesn't Drive	0-19 M	20+ M
Very Often	34	29	41	35	43	27	34	37	39
Sometimes	32	33	30	35	28	30	38	33	37
Rarely	14	13	22	14	11	15	11	13	11
Never	8	10	4	8	9	9	9	7	6
Don't Know	12	14	2	7	9	18	8	10	7

When you're the driver, how often do you wear your seatbelt?								
	All	Length of Commute			Education		Drives Over 70	
		Doesn't Drive	0-19 M	20+ M	HS or Less	College Plus	Most of the time/Often	Rarely/ Never
Always	91	100	87	93	88	92	85	93
Most of the time	6	0	8	3	7	5	10	4
Just Sometimes	2	0	3	1	3	2	2	2
Never	2	0	2	3	2	1	3	1

When you're the driver, how often do you wear your seatbelt?											
	All	2011	2010	2009	2008	Gender		Age			
						Men	Women	17-29	30-44	45-60	60+
Always	91	90	92	90	91	88	94	83	93	92	91
Most of the time	6	6	5	7	6	7	5	9	5	6	5
Just Sometimes	2	3	3	2	2	2	1	4	1	1	2
Never	2	2	1	1	1	2	1	4	2	1	1

And what do you think the chances are of getting a ticket if you don't wear your seat belt?											
	All	2011	2010	Gender		Age				Race	
				Men	Women	17-29	30-44	45-60	60+	White	Non-White
Very Likely	25	28	28	24	27	17	32	27	25	22	40
Somewhat Likely	35	38	37	36	34	57	32	36	33	36	34
Not Very Likely	25	23	22	24	23	17	25	25	22	26	14
Not Likely at All	10	7	9	12	11	9	8	9	14	13	7
Don't Know	4	3	4	4	5	0	4	4	6	5	5

How often do you personally drive your car and at the same time hold your cell phone and talk into it...?							
	All	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007	2005
Very Often	3	4	3	4	5	9	10
Sometimes	6	10	9	14	11	17	13
Rarely	27	25	26	27	22	28	23
Never	63	60	61	53	59	43	47
Don't Have Cell Phone	1	1	1	2	3	3	7

How often do you see people driving a car while they are also talking on a hand-held cell phone and talking....?												
	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008	Length of Commute			Age			
						Doesn't Drive	0-19 M	20+ M	17-29	30-44	45-60	60+
Very Often	72	74	77	80	79	66	73	79	54	70	75	73
Sometimes	22	21	18	17	15	22	27	17	35	24	18	22
Rarely	2	2	3	3	3	3	1	1	6	3	2	2
Never	3	1	1	1	2	3	4	1	4	2	4	2
Don't Know	1	1	1	0	1	2	0	1	0	1	1	1

Under the current New Jersey law, is it legal or illegal to talk on a hand held cell phone while driving?										
	All	Age				Length of Commute			Hand Held Phone	
		17-29	30-44	45-60	60+	Doesn't Drive	0-19 M	20+ M	Most of time/ Often	Rarely/ Never
Legal	2	11	2	2	2	5	3	1	2	2
Illegal	95	89	98	95	94	89	95	97	96	95
Not Sure	3	0	1	2	5	6	2	1	2	3

What do you think the chances are of getting a ticket if you talk on a hand held cell phone while driving?								
	All	Race		Education		More than 70		
		White	Non-White	HS or less	College +	time/ Often	Once in a while/ Never	
Very Likely	24	20	40	32	22	17	26	
Somewhat Likely	30	33	23	30	31	32	30	
Not Very Likely	26	27	20	16	29	34	23	
Not Likely at All	17	17	14	18	16	15	17	
Don't Know	3	3	2	5	3	2	4	

How would you rate your own driving skills compared to most other drivers on the road? Would you say that your skills are ...													
	All	2011	2010	2009	2008	Gender		Age				Marital Status	
						Men	Women	17-29	30-44	45-60	60+	Married	Never Married
Above Average	72	68	69	70	69	78	67	56	76	73	72	75	65
Just Average	27	32	29	30	30	20	32	44	24	25	28	24	35
Below Average	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	2	1	1	0
Don't Know/Refused	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Thinking about drivers from the states around us, which state would you say has the worst drivers...?											
	All	2011	2010	Length of Commute			Gender		Drives Over 70		
				None	Less than 20	20+	Men	Women	Most of the time/Often	Rarely/ Never	
Pennsylvania	15	19	15	6	16	21	18	13	18	14	
New York	52	52	56	58	53	51	45	57	48	53	
New Jersey	15	14	14	22	16	14	17	14	19	14	
Other	3	3	4	2	3	3	4	3	4	3	
Don't Know	14	12	11	12	12	11	16	13	10	15	