

Wolfe: Consequences of texting and driving



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By [Tom Wolfe](#), Published Jan. 19, 2012 in [The Journal Record](#) monthly legal column, [Gavel to Gavel](#).

Gavel to Gavel: Cellphone roulette

Do you like it to vibrate? Or do you spice it up with a ding, followed by vibrate?

No matter your preference, a text notification is almost impossible to ignore. But what happens when it comes while you are driving a car? Can you ignore it? Should the law require you to?

Driver distraction is the leading cause of vehicle crashes in the United States. According to a recent federal study, 80 percent of collisions are the result of some form of driver distraction occurring within three seconds of the accident. Reportedly, texting while driving makes you 23 times more likely to crash your car and is no less dangerous than driving drunk.

All but seven states have some form of legislation dealing with use of handheld devices while driving. But how are such laws enforced? Just how can a police officer tell if you're texting? And is texting any more dangerous than following GPS directions? What about eating a hamburger or putting on makeup?

Excepting school bus drivers and those with learners' permits, Oklahoma has only an "inattentive driver" criminal law, which went into effect in 2010. While it doesn't directly address cellphones or texting, it does allow for penalties if their use causes an accident. Bills expected to be introduced this year would ban texting with the penalty of a monetary fine and license suspension for repeat offenders.

If you are involved in an accident while texting (or otherwise not paying attention) while driving, you can be sued for negligence. The exact time of a text or call can be determined through a subpoena to your wireless carrier.

Though perhaps hard to enforce, how can texting while driving not be against the law? I see cars early in the morning, in the dark, stopped at red lights with no one around. That kind of law-abiding behavior is what makes us a civilized, safer society. Who's to say that even if a few people refrain from texting and driving, a tragedy isn't avoided?

It has to make you wonder if, when Commander Cody and His Lost Planet Airmen played "Son you're gonna' drive me to drinkin' if you don't stop driving that hot rod Lincoln," he was really worried about his son texting and driving.