Distracted driving is a serious concern for employers that operate fleets or whose employees must drive to perform their jobs. Joseph McKillips is executive director of Network of Employers for Traffic Safety (NETS), a collaborative group of employer road safety professionals that aims to advance road safety for employees, their families and communities by benchmarking fleet safety outcomes and sharing best practices.

**PS:** Is texting while stopped at a red light considered distracted driving?

Joe: Anything that can potentially distract a driver’s attention while the vehicle is either in motion on an active roadway or stopped, such as at a red light, can be considered a distraction. Drivers also commonly let their guard down and do not feel distracted if they text while stopped at a light. The problem is that the vehicle is still on the road and any number of issues are taking place around the vehicle that warrant the driver’s full attention. The driver’s ability to react to the actions of other drivers, even while stationary, is affected if s/he is focused on a smartphone instead of paying attention to the surrounding area. For example, an attentive driver would be able to react quickly and potentially take evasive action to avoid traffic approaching from behind or a crash that occurs nearby.

The best way to resist temptation to text or use a phone when in the vehicle is to put it in silent mode and place it in a secure location where the driver cannot reach it during the drive. This eliminates potential distractions.

**PS:** What strategies can companies use to help employees combat distracted driving during the holidays?

Joe: The holidays, or any events associated with travel and celebrations, raise the risk of death or injury from vehicle crashes. Often alcohol can be a factor, or people may be traveling in groups and become distracted in the vehicle.

Employers can raise awareness of the dangers of distraction during these times by offering practical alternatives to unsafe behavior. For example, employers can send short safety messages via social media and other communication channels a few weeks prior to the holiday or special event. Brief, impactful messages can remind employees that they are important to their families, friends and coworkers, and remind them to pay attention during holiday travel and to avoid impaired driving.

**PS:** What is the biggest obstacle employers face when banning cell phone use while driving? How can companies overcome this?

Joe: Employers are typically concerned about how banning cell phones while driving may affect productivity. The concept of down time when driving creates the impression that driving is a simple task, and that a driver can focus on multiple activities behind the wheel. But research indicates that distracted driving is often a key factor in vehicle crashes. This not only puts the driver and others on the road at risk, but also creates risk for the employer. Courts have found employers liable if a crash occurs and employees were found to be participating in conference calls, talking with managers or coworkers by phone, reading or responding to work-related e-mails or conducting any type of business while driving, even if using a personal vehicle to do so.

Once employers fully understand the devastating impact distracted driving can have on a company’s workforce, they realize the trade-off is not worth it.

**PS:** How can employers encourage focused driving among workers?

Joe: The best way an employer can encourage safe driving behavior is to conduct periodic, focused educational campaigns. Employees are more likely to pay attention to information provided by their employer, especially if they see policies that reinforce the safety messages, such as discouraging use of cell phones while driving or implementing a total cell phone ban while driving.

Understanding and taking action on the extensive distracted driving research is key; evidence-based research shows in-vehicle distractions are playing a significant role in elevated crash risk. Establishing formal expectations via company policies that prohibit all forms of distraction behind the wheel is the best defense against risk. Leadership can set examples by asking employees to refrain from attending conference calls or conducting other forms of business while driving.

NETS has developed a series of road safety tool kits that include attention-grabbing graphics and messages employers can use at no cost to draw attention to the critical topic of distracted driving, as well as other key issues such as speed, impaired driving and other topics. Visit the NETS website at [www.trafficsafety.org](http://www.trafficsafety.org) to download the latest campaign materials.