



KEEP SAFE

A Monthly Publication for Texas Electric Cooperatives

August 2009

Do GPS devices cause more accidents?

Remember that parental standby, “If your friends jumped off a cliff, would you?” As it turns out, this is good advice to heed when you use a GPS device: If your GPS tells you to drive off a cliff, would you?

Since GPS navigation systems are now common, a contributing link between the devices and accidents has been identified. While the reasons are varied, it often boils down to humans being human.

One of the most common human errors when it comes to using a GPS device is overconfidence in how smart that navigation system is or isn't. Why plan when your GPS will tell you where to go? Well, GPS devices are fallible; they're made so by satellite communication errors and outdated or inaccurate maps. Even when maps are current, some mapping and navigation information doesn't take into account road types. With this type of software error, the road that may look like the shortest distance between Point A and Point B might actually be an unpaved private drive. If your GPS device doesn't recognize it as such, it could add the road to your route.

Because of these factors, drivers find themselves driving on unsafe terrain and into other hazards, such as artificial lakes or train tracks. The more confident you are in what your GPS device tells you, the less likely you are to notice something's wrong. Accident risk increases when drivers take their GPS device's instructions too literally: Warnings of “when possible, make a legal U-turn” send some veering into oncoming traffic.

Driver inattention and distraction also increase accident risk. Many of us have seen such drivers on

the road: those who are having their morning cup of coffee, talking on the phone and reading the paper all while behind the wheel of their car. Sure, it's hard to eliminate all distractions while driving — who isn't guilty of tuning to a better song? In a study conducted by the Network of Employers for Traffic Safety (NETS), spilling hot coffee on yourself and dropping something on the floor are the two most common driver distractions. But the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates that driver distraction plays a role in 25 to 30 percent of the roughly 1.2 million car crashes in the United States each year [source: Stutts]. The greater number of devices in your car, from cell phones to GPS navigators to onboard entertainment systems, the greater the distraction possibilities. NETS also found that when GPS users mute the device they increase their distraction level — without the voice commands, drivers spent more time looking at the screen than the road [source: Smart Motorist].

It's no doubt that in most cases GPS navigation systems can get you to your destination unharmed, especially if you do a little groundwork before hitting the road. Prep the device before taking off to avoid the distraction of adjusting it while driving — that includes not only setting your start and end destinations but also adjusting settings. And minimize distraction by pulling over or relying on a passenger to make changes during the trip.

Consult a map and pay attention to the surroundings and road signs — GPS may be convenient but it can't replace common sense. If things don't look right, they probably aren't.

- by Maria Colensoi
howstuffworks.com



You should always set and adjust your GPS when you're pulled over.

Remind your kids about stranger danger

When school starts this Fall, your children may be minding their own business while walking to or from classes when a person in a car pulls up and asks for directions. While most strangers wouldn't do anything to hurt kids, some can be dangerous.

The Nemours Foundation Center for Children's Health Media reminds parents to provide these instructions to their children:

- ◆ Always take a buddy when walking to school, biking around the park or going to the store.
- ◆ Know some safe spots. If you ever feel threatened, go to the home of someone you know, a store or a restaurant. Other safe places include police stations, libraries and fire departments.
- ◆ If a stranger approaches and asks for help finding something he or she has lost — like a puppy or money — don't answer. Run the other way immediately and find an adult you know, or go to one of your safe spots.
- ◆ If a stranger on foot or in a car offers you a toy, some candy or anything else, don't accept it and run the other way.
- ◆ If a stranger comes to pick you up from school, don't get in the car. Run back into the school and tell a teacher or aide.
- ◆ If a stranger ever tries to grab you, yell things like, "Hey! I don't know you!" or "Help! This isn't my parent!"
- ◆ If you feel afraid around anyone pay attention to your feelings and get away as soon as possible or start to yell.

— *Today's Supervisor*
published by *The National Safety Council*

Protecting your eyes from the computer

Computer vision syndrome, symptoms of which include headaches, dry eyes and blurred vision, can occur in any work environment that requires extended periods of time looking at a computer monitor. The St. Louis-based American Optometric Association recommends that anyone who spends more than a couple of hours in front of the computer each day consult an optometrist to help prevent this condition.

To help alleviate symptoms of CVS, the association offers the following recommendations:

- ◆ **Get a thorough eye exam annually:** Even people who do not require glasses for other activities such as reading or driving may need them for computer work. A mild prescription can help prevent vision stress, and many prescriptions are tailored specifically for computer use — including no-line multifocal lenses with a wide area for viewing the entire screen.
- ◆ **Alternate job tasks:** Give your eyes a rest from the computer screen by taking breaks or focusing on other work activities like returning phone calls, making copies or speaking with co-workers. Spend time doing tasks that allow you to focus on objects at a farther range.
- ◆ **Reduce office lighting:** Light that is at half normal office levels is preferred. This can be achieved by removing some of the light bulbs from over overhead fixtures and using a desk lamp for tasks requiring additional light.

- ◆ **Use an adjustable copy holder:** Keeping reference material as close to the monitor as possible can keep your eyes from having to change focus when looking from one to the other.

— *Safety+Health*

Loss Control School Schedule

Metering School (<i>Tahoka</i>)	August 4 - 7
Hotline 1 - 4 School (<i>Merkel</i>)	August 10 - 14
Transformer School (<i>Fredericksburg</i>)	August 18 - 21
Troubleshooting School (<i>Tahoka</i>)	August 25 - 28
Hotline 1 - 4 School (<i>Gonzales</i>)	August 31 - Sept 4
Hotline 1 - 4 School (<i>Levelland</i>)	September 14 - 18
Transformer School (<i>Sulpher Springs</i>)	September 15 - 18
Underground School (<i>McGregor</i>)	September 21 - 25
Hotline 1 - 4 School (<i>Livingston</i>)	October 5 - 9
Underground School (<i>Levelland</i>)	October 12 - 16
Basic Pole Climbing (<i>Quitman</i>)	October 13 - 16
Underground School (<i>Merkel</i>)	October 19 - 23
Basic Pole Climbing (<i>Hondo</i>)	October 27 - 30

KeepSafe is originally published monthly by the Safety and Loss Control Department of Ohio Rural Electric Cooperatives, Inc., 6677 Busch Boulevard, Columbus, OH 43229 and reprinted by permission for Texas Electric Cooperatives, 1122 Colorado Street, 24th Floor, Austin, Texas 78701. Telephone: (512) 454-0311 Fax: (512) 763-3390
www.texas-ec.org