

Driving While 'Intexticated'

By Alan E. Achatz, CCM, CHE

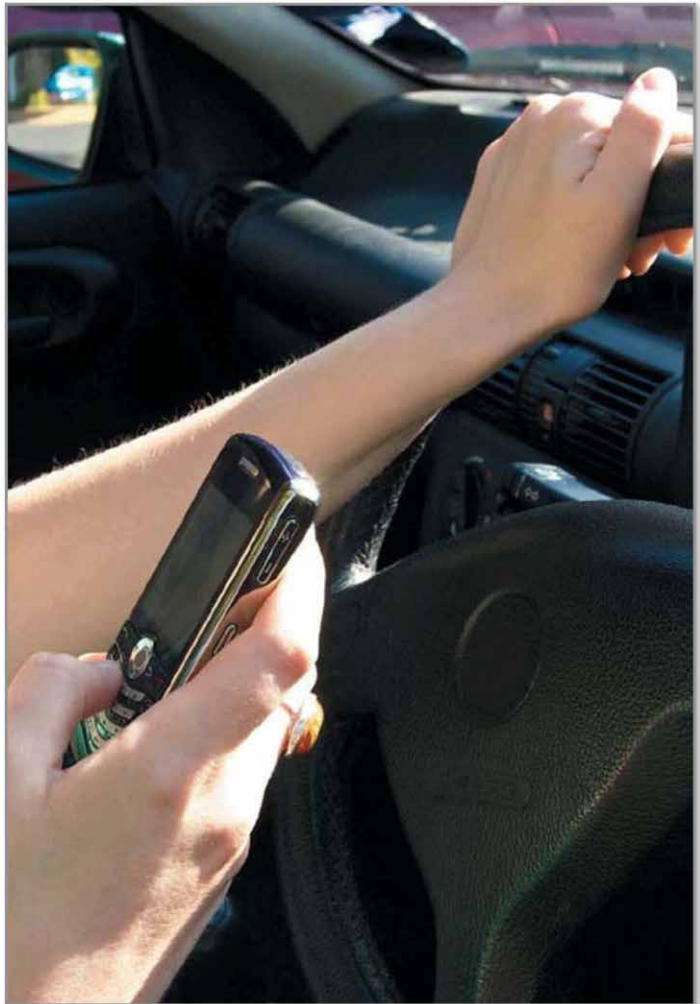
You're driving down the road, and a car in front of you is weaving and swerving. You cautiously slow down; amazed at how poorly the person is maintaining control of their vehicle. What's wrong with that driver? Is he drunk? Should you call 9-1-1?

That driver may not be drunk; he may be 'intexticated.'

Technology has forever changed our lifestyles. Whether we have a cell phone, BlackBerry, iPhone, hands-free Bluetooth, or perhaps some other electrical device inserted into our ear canal, we constantly are faced with distractions. We text, forward e-mails, look up the next number to call, and are offered countless 'apps.'

What is Happening at Your Club?

How are these technological tools impacting club operations? What are employees doing? What equipment are they using? Are they allowed to use their cell phone, Blackberry, iPhone, etc. during the work day? Are dishwashers, gardeners or greens mowers allowed to listen to music while working? What about the bag room staff? Lifeguards? Housekeepers? What about those servicing the golf carts? Obviously the service staff cannot listen to music while working, but do they duck out to check their e-mail or send a text while grabbing a smoke?



Do any employees run errands using club vehicles? Do they send text messages while driving? And what about their performance, their safety, their attention to the job at hand while texting?

Links to Information/Potential Training Tools

- The following link is a game that 'simulates' the skills needed to text and drive:
www.nytimes.com/interactive/2009/07/19/technology/20090719-driving-game.html
- Drive Safe – a mobile application that reads your text messages
www.drivesafe.ly
- A graphic four-minute video that could be used as a training tool:
www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/08/25/texting-while-driving-psa_n_268482.html

Many clubs already have a written technology policy for the members' use of cell phones, et al., but what about the staff's use? Might a staff member's proficiency doing a task be compromised?

Segueing back to the opening paragraph: Do any employees run errands using club vehicles? Do they send text messages while driving? And what about their performance, their safety, their attention to the job at hand while texting?

Obviously these concerns are directed toward what is happening at work, yet a second and possibly even larger concern involves what people are doing while traveling to and from work.

Travel Info, Stats & Facts

Texting bans are being enacted throughout the nation and enforcement varies. Informal discussions with a local police investigator questioned whether dialing a 10-digit phone number could be considered texting.

Texting while driving is a considerable concern. President Obama has banned 4.5 million federal employees (including the military) from text messaging when they are behind the wheel of government vehicles and from texting in their own cars if they use government-issued phones or are on official business.

One only has to look at the evening news to see the results of these distractions: a commuter train crash in California kills 20 people; a trolley driver slams into a vehicle injuring scores; and news videos chronicle drivers who lose control while talking on cell phones and/or texting while driving. In a local story, a truck driver lost control of his vehicle (he was texting with one hand and talking on his cell with the other) and smashed into another car and then went across a front lawn. The company truck ended up in a swimming pool

after injuring the home owner and her niece. Imagine if your club's name was on the side of that truck.

A report by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration states that almost 80 percent of all car accidents are the result of at least one of the drivers being distracted within three seconds or less before the accident took place. A recent *Wall Street Journal* story, "Should Driving While Texting be a Crime?" noted, "Forget DWI. The big new traffic-safety issue is DWT: Driving While Texting. A study conducted by Nationwide Mutual Insurance that was released this year found that 19 percent of all drivers – and 37 percent of drivers between the ages of 18 and 27 – text message behind the wheel."

Texting and driving is said to be worse than drinking and driving according to CNBC.com. *Car and Driver* magazine tested how long it would take to hit the brakes in various conditions. The conditions were: when sober, legally drunk with .08 blood alcohol level, reading an e-mail, and sending a text. Driving 70 miles per hour on a deserted air strip, *Car and Driver* editor Eddie Alterman was slower reacting and braking when e-mailing and texting.

Accident reconstruction expert Brian McHenry shared that a distracted driver traveling at 60 miles per hour travels approximately 88 feet per second. If a person looks away for three seconds, he/she has traveled almost the length of a football field, and that distance is *before* a person's perception/reaction time can kick in. Background: While driving, you have to perceive a need to react (you notice you're leaving the lane or a car is entering your path, etc.) and then implement the reaction (steering and/or braking). Simple perception/reaction times can vary from one-and-a-half to four seconds for normal drivers, so a quick peek at a text message

might mean that a person adds three or more seconds to the perception/reaction time. That means the vehicle may blindly travel as much as two football fields during texting. McHenry even added that these "slowed reaction times make an 'intoxicated' driver as bad as or worse than an inebriated driver."

Most of these texting situations involve personal vehicles – a 3,000-to-4,000-pound projectile. What if the trucker behind you (or approaching you) is distracted by texting or by referring to the GPS in the vehicle?

What about Members' Needs, Wants & Habits?

Do the members know and abide by the club rules and regulations? Are the members more considerate of others? Do they set their cell phone/PDA (both of them?) on vibrate before entering the club? Turn it off on the golf course? Or is it OK to use one on your course? Is there a written club policy for the members? Who enforces it?

All This Research Has Not Been Boring

Discussions with avid 'texters' shared that some are sending 3,000 messages a month! They do not have to look at the keyboard to text (depending on the size/style of the unit). Most admit to texting while driving.

Technological advances and means for communication are constantly expanding, and as club executives you have major concerns to address. Learning the facts can raise awareness, but changing ingrained behaviors will be difficult. Take a close look at your operation to determine next steps. You may want to open a dialogue with staff by saying, "We do not want you to multi-task. We want you to focus on the job at hand," then using some of the links in the above information box to reinforce that statement. ■

About the author

Alan E. Achatz, CCM, CHE, specializes in safety for athletic, city, country, golf, gun and yacht clubs. He conducts safety awareness programs, addresses crisis management scenarios and assists with OSHA compliance issues. He recently changed his business name to Club Safety Solutions and he may be reached at (716) 565-9122 or at www.clubsafetysolutions.com.