

AMERICAN SOCIETY OF SAFETY ENGINEERS NORTH FLORIDA CHAPTER

AUGUST 2015 NEWSLETTER

Distracted Walking and Chinese Sidewalks

In 2011, a young man was recorded by security cameras while he was talking on a cell phone and meandering along the edge of a deserted Philadelphia- area train platform at night. Nothing too unusual there; but he is then seen to suddenly stumble, lose his balance, and fall over the side. He landed head first on the tracks below.

Fortunately, there were no trains approaching the station at that moment in time. It took the man several minutes to recover enough to be able to climb out of danger, his life spared. But this incident certainly underscores the risks of what government officials and various experts say is a growing problem: distracted walking.

Three years ago, a town in New Jersey made it illegal to text while walking. This occurred after three people had died in separate texting while walking incidents. Additionally, other states like Arkansas, Illinois, and

New York, have considered doing the same; but they have met with little success. If we take the time to consider the gravity of a situation where our government has to mandate the use of common sense, it can become a bit distressing. But in reality, it is not the first time a government has had to protect its people from themselves.

According to Laptopmag.com, a study conducted by Jack Nasar, who is an Ohio State University professor, found that pedestrians talking or texting on cellphones were much more likely to walk in front of cars than those not using phones. No surprises there. In fact, he likely theorized this prior to conducting the study.

Mr. Nasar also makes us aware of another study conducted by Ohio State University, this one was nationwide. It concluded that more than 1,500 pedestrians were estimated to be treated in emergency rooms in 2010 for injuries related to using

a cell phone while walking. The study goes on to point out that the number of such injuries has more than doubled since 2005, with seemingly no hope of any abatement in sight.

Mr. Nasar further states that “for pedestrians as with drivers, cognitive distraction from mobile phone use reduces situation awareness, increases unsafe behavior, putting pedestrians at greater risk for accidents and crime victimization.”

David Schwebel, a professor who studies this particular navigational challenge at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, explained, “Walking actually involves a fair amount of complexity. Our brain has to work hard to make sure we walk safely, especially near traffic. Our brain also has to work hard to text message.” In other words, your brain can only do so much at one time.

Of note, one of many recent studies conducted on this topic showed that

65 percent of people text while walking. As a result of my daily personal observations, however, I have come to believe that number to be at least ten percent low. In the 13- to 17-year-old age range, according to the study, that number jumps to 73 percent. While it may or may not be the government's domain to protect us from ourselves, most people are aware that it can be dangerous to text while walking. So then, if we are simply unwilling to keep our phone in our pocket for a few seconds, we could always try a new breed of texting apps. These applications enable you to see on your smartphone screen, at least somewhat,

where you are walking while you text. But it seems to make more sense to just keep the phone in our pocket, if we indeed have the willpower. Therefore, we must consider if jeopardizing our personal safety while walking is worth sending a text to our BFF about how cute our dog's fetching ability is.

So how do we as a society tackle this issue? Consider this if you will. According to Forbes magazine, a city in southwestern China has painted lines and cell phone icons on the ground in certain areas of the city frequented by pedestrians. This is meant to delineate where those using cell

phones should walk and where those not using them should walk. Reportedly, however, this is not always effective as those who are texting while walking do not notice the markings that are painted on the ground. Are you surprised?



Photo credit: Forbes Magazine/CHINATOPIX/AP

Bob Dooley

Member Accomplishments

The ASSE local chapter would like to recognize and congratulate Anne Rogers for recently passing the Board of Certified Safety Professionals ASP exam. We are very proud of her.

Contact the ASSE Local Chapter

Find us on the web at:

<http://nfl.asse.org/>

Find us on Facebook at:

<https://www.facebook.com/ASSENFL>

Article Sources and Hyperlinks of Interest

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/07/30/texting-while-walking_n_1717864.html

<http://ehssafetynewsamerica.com/tag/text-messaging/>

<http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/headlines/2012/05/texting-while-walking-banned-in-new-jersey-town/>

<http://researchnews.osu.edu/archive/distractwalk.htm>

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/andrewbender/2014/09/16/fed-up-with-texting-pedestrians-city-creates-sidewalk-cell-phone-lane/print/>

Next ASSE Local Chapter Meeting

Our next membership meeting will be held at the Northeast Florida Safety Council on Sept 16th at 11:30 a.m. The meeting topic will be employee medical cases and workers compensation. The speaker will be Dr. Chapa, who is Occupational Health Director at UF Health. Please RSVP to Steve Wilson at steven_wilson1@me.com.

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