



traffic safety

DASHBOARD DISTRACTIONS

IN-CAR INFORMATION SYSTEMS MIGHT NOT BE AS SAFE AS THEY SEEM

In the highly competitive auto industry, manufacturers are installing increasingly sophisticated communications and entertainment systems in their vehicles to attract the attention of car buyers in their showrooms. However, new research by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety raises concerns about the manner in which these systems occupy the attention of drivers on the road.

In an evaluation of 30 vehicles from the 2017 model year, researchers found that the information systems inside 23 cars, trucks and SUVs placed a “high” or “very high” combination of mental and visual demands on test participants. The ratings are based on internationally accepted standards for measuring mental and visual distraction, with a “very high” rating comparable to balancing a checkbook in your head while driving, and a “low” rating on par with listening to the radio or an audiobook.

Closely monitored test subjects used the cars’ touchscreens, dials and voice-activated features to adjust the audio systems; place phone calls; send and receive text messages; and use navigation systems while driving on residential roads in Salt Lake City, Utah. A dozen vehicles received a “very high” rating, and 11 vehicles were rated “high” demand. Seven fell into the “moderate” category, but none were deemed “low” demand.

The research team, based at the University of Utah, also found that longer interactions placed greater demands on drivers than short, simple tasks. Inputting navigation was found to be the most demanding task, with 10 of the 12 models rated “very high” allowing the driver to enter a destination into the navigation system while the vehicle was in motion. (AAA recommends only entering destinations into your navigation system when your vehicle is parked.)

Washington state’s new distracted-driving law bans the use of handheld electronic devices while driving, but it does not prohibit the use of information systems built into vehicles. AAA cautions motorists against assuming that these latter systems are safe to use while driving. In addition to raising public awareness, AAA is sharing the findings with automakers, to help them design systems placing lower levels of mental and visual demand on drivers.

“Automakers should aim to reduce distractions by designing systems that are no more visually or mentally demanding than listening to the radio or an audiobook,” says Kirk R. Nelson, president and CEO of AAA Washington. “And drivers should avoid the temptation to engage with these technologies, especially for non-driving tasks.”

>> VISIT AAA.COM/DISTRACTION TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE STUDY, INCLUDING IN-DEPTH REPORTS ON THE SYSTEMS IN THE 30 VEHICLES THAT WERE EVALUATED.



GRAND OPENING! JOIN US TO CELEBRATE OUR NEW BELLEVUE CRUISE & TRAVEL STORE

The team at AAA’s Bellevue store has moved, and we invite you to celebrate the grand opening of our new downtown Bellevue location with us, throughout the month of January. The AAA Bellevue Cruise & Travel store features state-of-the-art digital and video technology that brings you to your destination before your vacation begins, and more room to shop for the latest in travel gear and accessories. Whether you live or work in Bellevue or are just passing through, **STOP BY IN JANUARY AND ENTER A DRAWING FOR A CHANCE TO WIN A EUROPEAN VIKING RIVER CRUISE FOR TWO, DELTA VACATIONS AND DELTA AIR LINES PRIZES, AND MUCH MORE** (drawing to be held on Feb. 2; no purchase necessary to enter). The new store (open Mon.–Fri., 9 a.m.–6 p.m.; Sat., 10 a.m.–5 p.m.) is located at 1100 Bellevue Way N.E., Ste. 7. 425.455.3933.