



The DISPATCH

PennDOT Crash Newsletter - News you can use!

What's New?

Distracted Driver Guidance

Distracted driving is commonly defined as “when a driver’s attention is diverted away from driving by a secondary task that requires focusing on an object, event, or person not related to the driving task.” The increased use of electronic devices by drivers has brought new awareness to the problem of distracted driving. To assist in identifying distracted driving in crashes, we did some research into best practices.

To prove that a driver crashed due to being inattentive requires finding out what activities the driver was doing in the car, preserving proof of those activities through witnesses and forensics, demonstrating that the choice to engage in the activity put lives in danger, and determining what consequences resulted from that choice.

What can law enforcement do to better identify and collect evidence of distracted driving? There are two basic ways that an officer may be alerted to distracted driving infractions: by observing the driver’s prohibited behavior, or by observing the vehicle in motion cues.

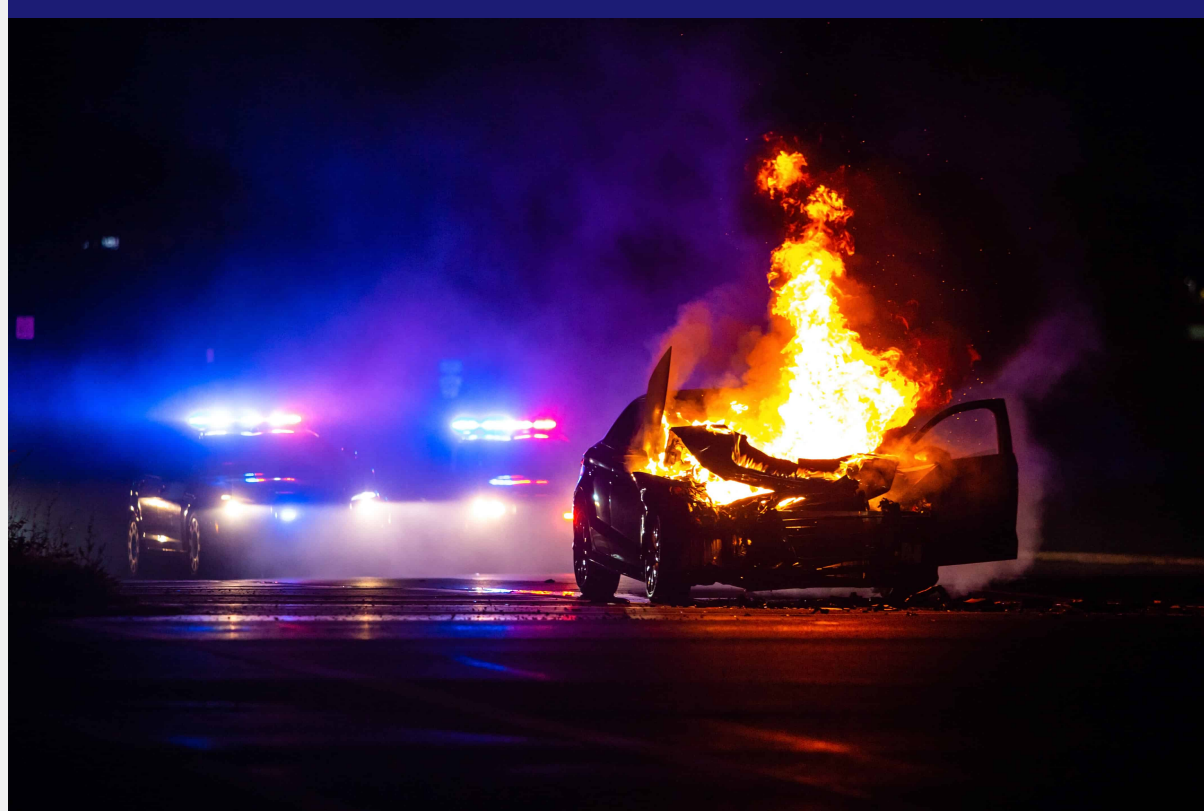
Below is a list of some distracted driving indicators:

- Nearly striking an object or vehicle
- Driving into opposing or crossing traffic
- Failure to maintain consistent speed
- Failure to safely maintain lane control
- Hand to ear with device in hand
- Turning abruptly or illegally
- Intermittently looking down
- Slow response to traffic signals
- Failure to signal
- Night time glow of the device

Once an investigator determines that distracted driving is a factor in a crash, the critical task of collecting evidence begins. Early action is beneficial because, as time passes, witnesses’ memories tend to fade, witnesses can disappear, and suspects and their accomplices can destroy evidence. Evidence generally falls within two categories, physical or testimonial. Physical evidence includes items in the involved vehicles and on the scene. Testimonial evidence is any evidence that is not proven or supported by the physical evidence but solely based on a credible witness.

Regardless of the particular charge, without a thorough investigation of the crash and all the surrounding circumstances, prosecutors may have difficulty proving that distraction caused the crash. Detailed report writing and complete documentation of all the evidence can substantially aid in successful prosecution.

Working Together



Vehicle Fires-When are they reportable?

Determining if a vehicle fire is reportable comes down to whether the motor vehicle that suffered the fire was on the roadway and in transport, in addition to meeting the towing and/or injury reportability requirements. Smoke is not indicative of an active fire and is not evidence of a fire’s presence. Therefore, the driver and/or witnesses must submit statements or police must use other evidentiary measures to prove the presence of the actual fire existed before the vehicle pulled off the roadway.

Example 1: Unit 1 is stopped at a four-way intersection awaiting a green light. The driver notices flames coming from the engine compartment and pulls off the roadway, exiting the vehicle which in-turn suffers disabling damage. Witness 1 states that Unit 1 was on fire while it was stopped at the intersection. In this example, Unit 1 suffered disabling damage caused by fire while on a roadway and was corroborated by both the driver and witness, making this vehicle fire **REPORTABLE**.

Example 2: Unit 1 is driving East down Main Street when the driver notices smoke coming from under the hood of the vehicle. The driver pulls over to the side of the roadway where the vehicle bursts into flames. Unit 1 had to be towed from the scene. In this example, although Unit 1 suffered disabling damage, the fire did not occur on the roadway, making this vehicle fire **NON-REPORTABLE**.



Advantages of Using GPS Coordinates Over Landmarks

The use of global positioning systems (GPS) has progressed significantly in both accuracy and ease of use since its introduction. GPS coordinates can be generated using handheld devices, smartphones, and a multitude of computer friendly applications. Entering GPS coordinates into the Crash Reporting System is fast & effective for generating a GIS map with an accurate crash location.

Google maps is an excellent tool for finding crash locations and generating accurate GPS coordinates. The reporting officer can use Google to determine or verify crash locations even when it is not available at the scene. For example, in areas where cell tower coverage is poor, the reporting officer can capture images or take notes of discernable importance for later use. Then, in an office setting, search google maps using specifics such as street name, county, and township to find the general location, and from that point use the “browse street

view images tool to virtually drive the route and find the exact location and a GPS coordinate. Google maps will allow the user to search specific state routes, counties, and townships which is especially helpful for roads that cross township and county boundaries.

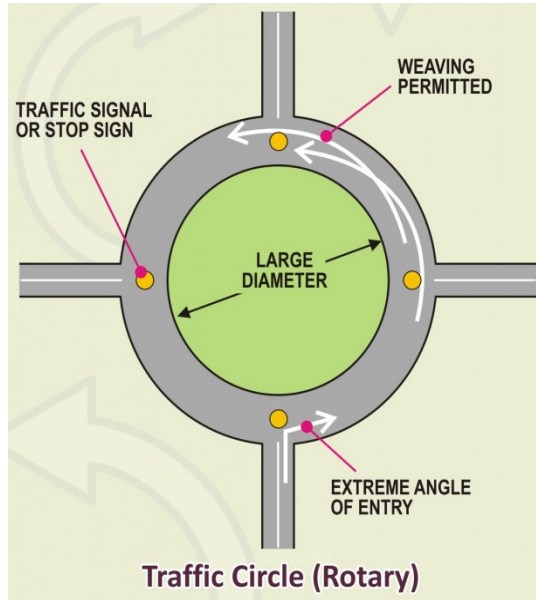
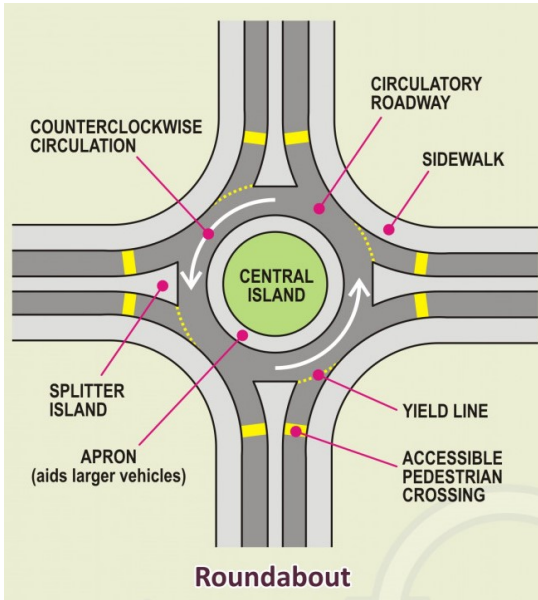
In addition, numerous crash reporting tools have integrated mapping tools, such as TraCS and the CRS website, where reporting officers can point and click on a map directly pinpointing an accurate location. As a result, the generation of GPS coordinates produces more accurate locations, saves time, and results in more pushed crash reports in CRS than when using landmarks alone.

Understanding Crash Terms

Roundabout vs. Traffic Circle

A roundabout is a circular intersection that moves traffic counterclockwise around a smaller diameter central island. All points of entry are controlled by yield signs and no pedestrian activity is permitted on the central island. Parking is prohibited on the circulatory roadway or within close proximity to the entry points. Speeds maintained are typically under 25 mph.

A traffic circle is a circular intersection that moves traffic counterclockwise around a larger diameter central island. All points of entry are controlled by stop signs or traffic signals and some traffic circles allow pedestrian activity on the central island. Parking is occasionally permitted within the larger circular roadways. Speeds maintained are typically above 25 mph.



IN A ROUNDABOUT...

- ✓ Vehicles entering just **SLOW DOWN** and **YIELD** to traffic already in the roundabout.
- ✓ Circulating traffic **DOES NOT STOP**. This constant flow allows the roundabout to accommodate high volumes of traffic.
- ✓ Vehicle speeds are geometrically restricted — essentially limiting motorists to **BELOW 30 MPH**.
- ✓ Vehicles **DO NOT CHANGE LANES**, unless exiting multilane roundabouts.

IN A TRAFFIC CIRCLE...

- ✗ Vehicles entering are often stop controlled by a **SIGNAL OR STOP SIGN**.
- ✗ Circulating traffic is commonly required to **STOP FOR ENTERING TRAFFIC**. This results in congestion and significant delays.
- ✗ Large traffic circles typically have **HIGH-SPEED** entries.
- ✗ Vehicles are **PERMITTED TO CHANGE LANES**. When paired with high speeds, it can lead to dangerous crashes.

National studies show that modern roundabouts reduce:

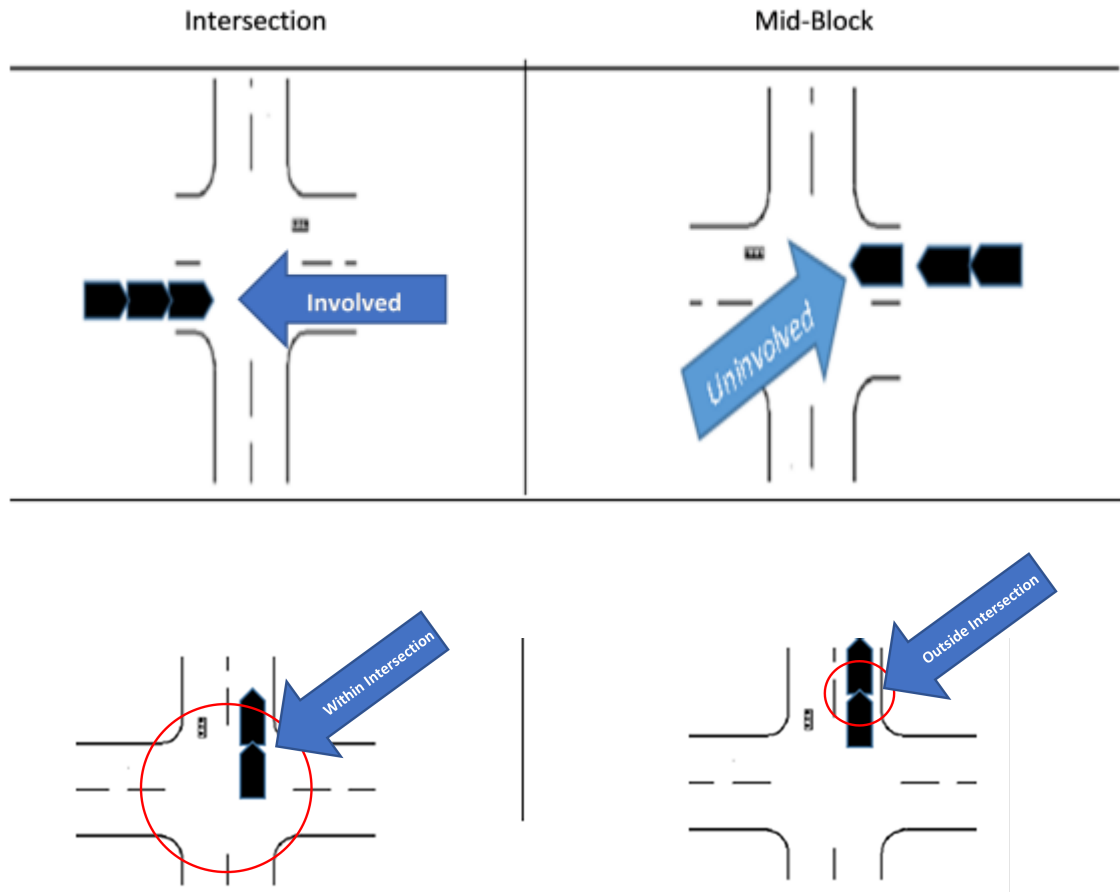
- Fatal crashes by 90 percent
- Injury crashes by 75 percent
- Pedestrian crashes by 30-40 percent
- Bicycle crashes by 10 percent



Intersection vs. Midblock

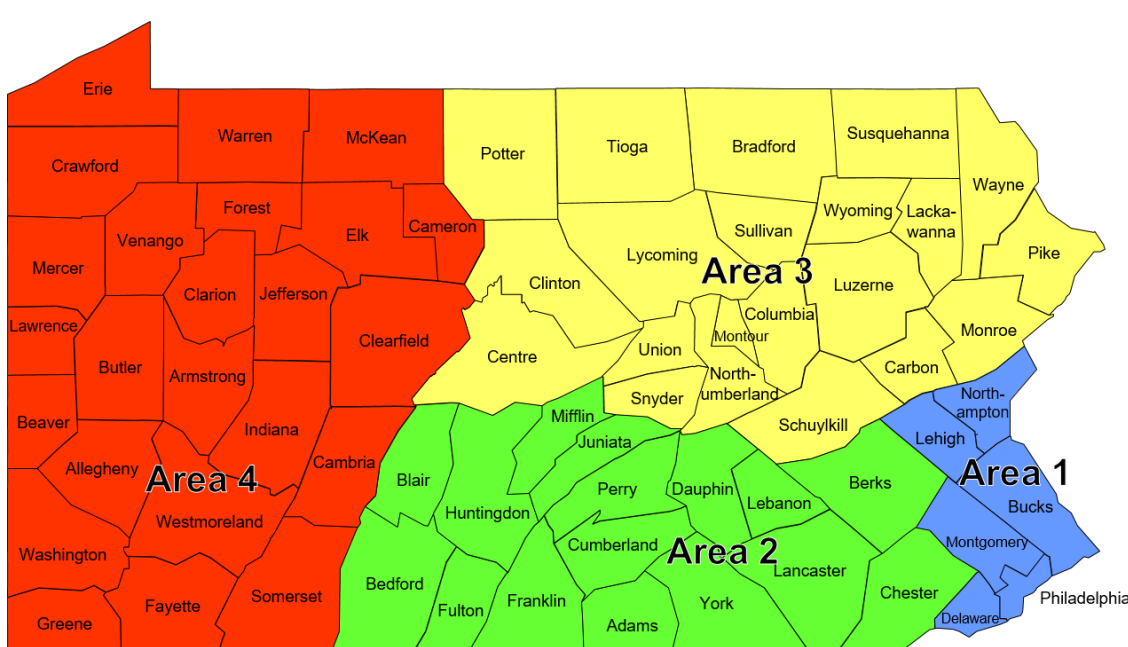
An intersection crash is defined as a crash that occurs within the confines of an intersection or is related to any movements within an intersection. For example, if a crash involves the first unit at a traffic light or stop sign the crash is classified as an intersection crash.

A midblock crash is defined as a crash that occurs between intersections and is not related to any movements within an intersection. If a midblock crash occurs due to activity at a nearby intersection, it is deemed a midblock crash with the intersection related field marked yes. For example, if unit 1 gets rear-ended by unit 2 while stopped in a line of traffic at a traffic control device, this crash would be classified as a midblock crash with the intersection related field marked yes.



FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Regional Traffic Records Project Administrator Area Map (RTRPA)

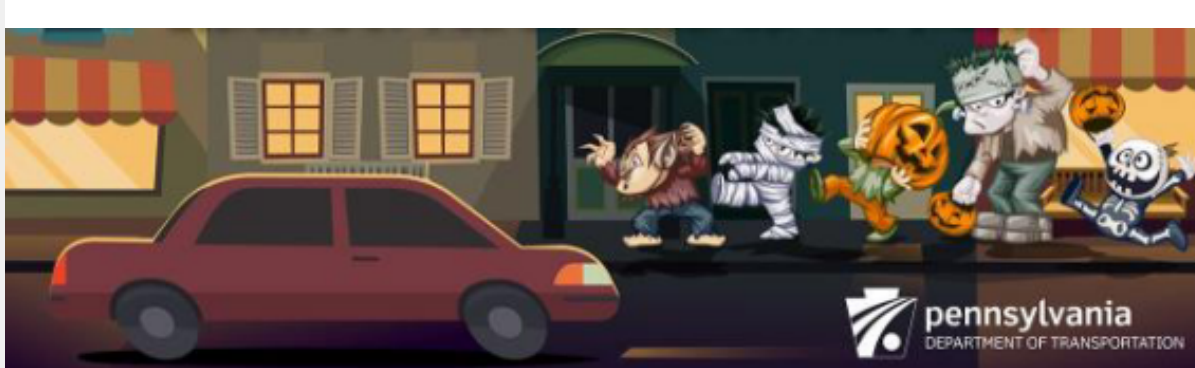


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Now that you've made it to the end of the newsletter, how would you rate its content?

Not helpful at all 0 1 2 3 4 Very helpful

For questions or concerns, email us at ra-pdleadhelp@pa.gov.

