



## **DISTRACTED-DRIVING OBSERVATION PROCEDURES**

*Distracted driving is a complex issue with its own set of challenges. Data collection continues to be a challenge, making it difficult to gauge the extent of the problem. Enforcing the law comes with a set of challenges that are unique to each State's law. In an effort to understand the extent of the problem, how to best direct enforcement resources, and how to organize outreach and awareness efforts, the following distracted-driving observation principles will help localities with an easy-to-use protocol for observing and documenting cell phone use/texting/manipulation of a cell phone while driving. This non-scientific protocol will provide local communities and law enforcement agencies with an added set of data to analyze and a local snapshot of the problem.*

**Schedule:** Observations should be conducted at the same time of day and day of week. Observations cannot be made in rainy or other inclement weather conditions. Time of day is at the discretion of the recording agency. However, if rush hour traffic consists of an overrepresentation of motorists outside the community, then it is encouraged to avoid those times.

*For regularly scheduled observations, it is desirable that the distracted-driving observations be conducted at the same locations and same times. However, it is understandable if agency priorities or inclement weather prevent this consistency.*

**Sample Size/Locations:** Try to collect data from 100 to 200 vehicles each time an observation is conducted. Consider an observation time period of 60-90 minutes. These observations should be made at high or medium traffic density areas, and represent urban, and suburban, settings, if possible. Stopped or slow moving traffic locations are ideal, such as intersections, entrances to shopping centers, ramps off of highways and roads frequently used by local motorists.

**Observation Sites:** Personal safety and the safety of the motorists in traffic are paramount. Observers and data collectors need to be out of harm's way of moving traffic (behind guardrail, on hill, off sidewalk past curb, etc.), yet be in an area that offers a clear view of drivers.

**Personnel:** Ideally, an observer and data collector are used to conduct the distracted-driving observations and record the data, respectively. The observer indicates whether the driver is talking on a phone or texting, and calls out the result to the data recorder, who enters it on a data collection form. There might be traffic situations and locations where an observer would also have the time to record the data and therefore conduct the observation alone; however, this is not recommended. Observers can be volunteers from the community, law enforcement officers or cadets, members of the local safety coalition, or others.



**Clothing/Equipment:** Should law enforcement officers conduct the observation, plain clothes are preferred. All observers and data recorders should wear safety vests. It is suggested that all vehicles be far removed from oncoming motorist views. *(Observers cannot be wearing law enforcement uniforms nor have any police vehicles present near the observation post. There must not be any signs indicating a distracted-driving survey is being conducted.)* Dress according to weather and site conditions. Clipboards, pencils, and data collection forms need to be on hand as well.

**Observation Data:**

The following data are to be collected.

- Front seat, driver only
- Gender (male, female)
- Age estimate – driver (<25, 25-59, 60+)
- Type of vehicle (passenger car, pickup, SUV, or van)

*Note: Do not collect data on commercial, emergency, or recreational vehicles.*

**Observation Procedures:**

*Identify a mark (e.g., highway sign, signal pole, cross street) to use for identifying the vehicle you are observing. Make sure the mark is upstream enough to allow time to observe all the data you need to collect. Practice observations and recording data to determine best mark.*

1. Select vehicle crossing designated observation spot.

*Note: On road with two or more traffic lanes, observe traffic in only one lane at a time. Split up time for each lane. Choose the direction of traffic that represents the most motorists.*

2. Designate an observer and a data recorder. The observer watches traffic and relays the information to the data recorder to document cell phone use of driver. *("Y" for holding a cell phone to ear, near head or mouth, extended in front of driver, manipulation, observed looking down at the phone; or "N" for no visible phone in the driver's hand.)*
3. Observe and record driver gender ("M" or "F") and age estimate for driver ("1"=<25, "2"=25-59, "3"=60+).
4. Observe and record vehicle type ("C" for Car, "T" for Pickup Truck, "S" for SUV, or "V" for Van).

*Note: If any data element is missed or unknown, leave that field on the form blank.*

5. After data is recorded, look up and select the next vehicle that crosses the observation spot, and repeat Steps 1 through 4.

*Note: Skip vehicles that have dark tinted windows, that are going too fast, or that cannot be accurately observed for any other reason, and move to the next target vehicle.*

An example of a data collection form is provided with these instructions.



**Forms:** Upon completion of observations, review the forms to make sure there are no illegible recordings, and then enter into Excel or a spreadsheet for analysis.

**Contact:** If there are any questions, especially during data collection, please contact [insert name] at xxx-xxx-xxxx ext. xxx.

**Feedback:** Summary reports will be sent to the law enforcement agency within one week of receiving the data.



# CELL PHONE USE OBSERVATION FORM

OBSERVER LOCATION: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Street and Cross Street or Other Landmark)

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_ DAY OF WEEK: \_\_\_\_\_

WEATHER CONDITION:  
1 Clear / Sunny 2 Cloudy  
3 Clear But Wet

TRAFFIC DIRECTION (Circle one): N S E W

START TIME: \_\_\_\_\_ (Observation period will last approx. 60-90 minutes)

STATE LAW: ☐ Cell phone ban  
☐ Texting ban

	Vehicle Type C = Car T = Pickup S = SUV V = Van	Driver Cell Phone Use Y = Yes N = No	Sex M = Male F = Female	Estimate of Driver Age 1 = <25 2 = 25-59 3 = 60+
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2				
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*Cell phone use is defined as the driver:*

- *Holding a cell phone to the ear, near his/her face;*
- *Talking into a cell phone while holding it;*
- *Looking down at the phone on his/her lap or center console; or*
- *Manipulating a cell phone in his/her hand.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Optional) Observer's Name, Organization/Agency