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Save a life: Avoid distractions while driving

Some temptations are hard to resist. For me, it can be especially challenging to turn down that last piece of chocolate cake.

While driving, we typically hear that ding on our phone, alerting us to a text or call coming through, and we sometimes feel the urgent need to check it. We know we shouldn't, but we reason that we're going to make an exception—just this once.

So, why do we indulge in behavior we know to be wrong, dangerous and in many states illegal? Call it hubris. According to AAA research, most people feel they are better-than-average

drivers. After all, we have busy lives and are accustomed to multitasking. But mounds of research and thousands of deaths every year prove otherwise.

August is Back-to-School Safety Month. As a new school year begins with young drivers and school buses back on the road, I thought it would be a good time to remind folks, including myself, of the dangers of distracted driving.

The reality is that using a phone while driving creates enormous potential for injuries and fatalities. Distractions take a motorist's attention off driving, which can make a driver miss critical events, objects and cues, potentially leading to a crash.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 1 in 10 fatal crashes in the U.S. involves distracted driving, resulting in more than 3,000 deaths annually. I find this statistic heartbreaking considering so many of these accidents can easily be avoided if we'd simply put down our phones while driving.

Distracted driving is considered any activity that diverts our attention, including texting or talking on the phone, and adjusting the navigation or entertainment system. Texting is by far one of the most dangerous distractions. Sending or reading one text takes your eyes off the road for an average of five seconds. At 55 mph,



Wendy Sellers
President/CEO

that's like driving the length of an entire football field with your eyes closed.

In addition to refraining from texting while driving, we can help keep the roads safe by moving over for first responders and other emergency vehicles. Additionally, if you see utility crews conducting work near the roadside, I encourage you to move over when possible and give them extra space to perform their work safely.

At Washington EMC, safety is foremost in everything we do—for our employees and the members of the communities we serve. We routinely remind our crews of the dangers of distracted driving, and we hope you'll have similar conversations with your teens, who may be new to the roadways and are especially susceptible to the lure of technology.

Let's work together to keep everyone safe on the roads. Remember: That text can wait, and waiting just might save a life.

**Play it safe.
That text can wait.**



While driving, turn your phone to silent mode or pull over if the text can't wait.



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A quick little tip: Leave your A/C on during vacations

If you're thinking about saving a few bucks by shutting your central air conditioning off while you escape for summer vacation, consider what you need to keep cool in your home while you're gone.

At the top of that list is your refrigerator. In a kitchen that's too warm, your refrigerator has to work at least twice as hard to keep its interior cold. It will put in double duty regardless of whether there's food inside of it, as long as it's plugged in.

That can counteract any energy savings you might see when you turn off the A/C for a week. And it could stress your refrigerator out enough to damage or even ruin it.

Best bet: Nudge the thermostat up 4-5° higher than usual before you leave for vacation. That way your house won't be as cool as it would



be to keep people comfortable, but it won't get so warm that your refrigerator is uncomfortable.

Plus, keeping the A/C on could prevent other problems that may occur in a home that gets too humid because of a lack of air conditioning, such as mold and mildew growth, and damage to electronics.

Energy Efficiency Tip of the Month

An easy way to save energy is to seal air leaks and holes where plumbing pipes run through walls in your home. You can also check wall-mounted cabinets for plumbing holes or air gaps in the back. Fill any holes or gaps with spray foam. Wear protective gloves and use a damp rag for cleanup.

Source: www.energy.gov





Rooftop solar: To add or not to add

MIKE TEEGARDEN

If you've thought about adding solar as a home energy source, you've likely had an array of questions.

As your local electric cooperative, Washington EMC has answers.

When considering a rooftop solar system, it's important to know the facts regarding efficiency and energy savings—and whether solar will meet your needs, goals and financial objectives.

Typically, homeowners who install solar do so out of concern for the environment, to save money or both. It's important to know how rooftop solar at your home will impact these goals.

"If you are considering solar for any reason, it's important to contact Washington EMC during the decision-making process," says Wendy Sellers, President/CEO at Washington EMC. "We are a trusted energy advisor and can answer questions about costs, possible savings and what kind of investment will best fit your electric needs."

While each home is different in terms of how much energy solar will provide, there are a few key factors to consider:

Energy consumption

A solar system's size is based on the home's energy needs. Before installing solar, make sure your home is as energy-efficient as possible in terms of lighting, heating and cooling systems, and insulation. An energy-efficient home will require a smaller solar system, which will save money and help reduce environmental impact.

Associated costs and maintenance

The age and orientation of your roof will affect your costs. The best orientation for solar panels is facing south to receive direct sunlight; a shaded roof doesn't produce as much solar energy. Because it costs more to replace a roof on a home with solar panels, the age of your roof should also be considered. Will your roof need to be replaced before solar panels need to be replaced? Just as a shingled roof doesn't last forever, neither does a solar panel system, which has an average lifespan of 25 to 30 years. Also, as a solar system ages, it produces less energy and may require maintenance and repairs.

Your access to reliable electricity

Solar panels only produce power when the sun is shining. To have power at your home at night or on cloudy days, you'll need to remain connected to a primary power source, such as Washington EMC.

Signing a solar contract

Before you hire a solar contractor, contact Washington EMC to learn about our rate structures and interconnection agreements. As with any major home-improvement project, get bids from three contractors to compare equipment and pricing when considering solar.

"Washington EMC is always available to help in the process of obtaining the solar array that's right for you," says Clayton Jones, Washington EMC's Solar Coordinator. "Be sure to visit our website at www.washingtonemc.com to review helpful resources to assist you in evaluating solar options."

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