



## NATIONAL MEDIA RELEASE

Embargoed until 6am, 27 November 2007

# Young drivers sending - but not getting - the message

Sophisticated mobile phones, MP3 players and other handheld gadgets are driving techno-savvy young drivers to distraction, according to new research from leading insurer AAMI.

AAMI Public Affairs Manager Geoff Hughes said the 2007 *AAMI Young Drivers Index*<sup>1</sup> revealed more than three-quarters of drivers aged 18 - 24 admitted to reading or sending a text message while driving – double that of drivers aged over 25 (75 per cent compared to 36 per cent).

“Young Australians have embraced mobile phones as a means of immediate, convenient communication, however, this has unfortunately resulted in an increase in the number of people using mobile phones while driving to talk, and increasingly text,” Mr Hughes said.

“This dangerous practice has the potential to reduce driver reaction times and increase the risk of an accident. But despite severe infringement penalties and widespread publicity of the dangers of using mobile phones while driving, it is still an all-too-common practice among young people.”

Mr Hughes said that as mobile phones have become increasingly compatible with popular interactive web-based applications, the potential for additional, unwanted driver distractions has increased.

“Many handsets now allow users to use interactive, web-based applications like MySpace and Facebook, which are extremely popular among young people,” he said. “For the safety of all road users, young drivers should refrain from using their phone while driving to talk, text or surf the internet.”

### Reaching for the MP3

The research also showed young drivers were more likely to take their ‘i’ off the road, when using MP3 players to play their favourite music in the car, with one-fifth (20 per cent) admitting to being distracted while using this technology, compared to only seven per cent of drivers aged over 25.

“With the ability to shuffle and sort thousands of songs, video and photographs, these miniature devices are a distraction waiting to happen,” Mr Hughes said.

“However, the traditional car stereo also has the ability to distract young drivers with 58 per cent admitting they have sometimes lost concentration while changing the CD, tape, or radio station while driving, compared to 38 per cent of older drivers.”

### Young drivers – they’re fast...

Speed is known to be a major contributor to car accidents and young drivers are twice as likely to die on our roads as the rest of the population<sup>2</sup>. Despite these alarming statistics, almost one-fifth of drivers under 25 (18 per cent) say they exceed the speed limit “most of the time”, compared to seven per cent of other drivers.

“On top of this, 19 per cent say they often ignore restricted speed limits, such as outside school zones or suburban roads, or during roadworks, as opposed to nine per cent of drivers aged more than 25,” Mr Hughes said. “So it comes as no surprise that young drivers are more likely to have been fined for speeding in the last two years than older drivers (26 per cent compared to 19 per cent).”

### ...and furious

While speed alone is dangerous, the level of danger increases when coupled with aggression, and it seems young drivers are much more likely than other drivers to exhibit signs of road rage.

“It seems young people know the best response to road rage, with half (50 per cent) saying they would ideally signal an apology to the other driver and concentrate on their own driving,” Mr Hughes said. “However, in reality,

---

<sup>1</sup>The 2007 Young Drivers Index was conducted for AAMI by Sweeney Research and is an independent telephone and internet survey of 2380 Australian drivers in all States and Territories (except WA as AAMI does not operate there).

<sup>2</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics

20 per cent said they would be more likely to retaliate with their own offensive gesture or by yelling at the other driver.”

One of the most startling revelations, Mr Hughes said, was that almost one-third (30 per cent) of young drivers admitted to getting so angry with another driver, that they ended up tailgating them. “Tailgating is an extremely dangerous practice that puts both vehicles at high risk of having a rear end collision that causes property damage, injuries and even death – it’s worrying to think that so many young drivers are undertaking such reckless behaviour on our roads.”

But dangerous driving behaviour is not always the result of driver anger – many young drivers say they have been put in danger by a driver who simply wanted to show off. “Almost three-quarters of young drivers (73 per cent) have been a passenger in a car where the driver drove dangerously to show off, as opposed to 60 per cent of older drivers,” Mr Hughes said.

***The Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association, the peak industry body representing the mobile telecommunications industry, offers the following tips for drivers wanting to use their mobile phone.***

- 1. Never use a hand-held mobile:** In Australia it is illegal to use a mobile phone while driving unless you use a hands-free, in-car kit or portable, hands-free device. When using a portable, hands-free device make sure it is set up and working before you start to drive. A hands-free device can reduce the physical effort to make and receive calls, however, it alone doesn’t make using a mobile phone while driving safe.
- 2. Never read or send an SMS, take notes, or look up phone numbers:** Always keep both eyes on the road and do not read or send text messages or take notes during a call while driving. If required, use a directory assistance service that connects you directly to the number and don’t look up phone numbers from your phone’s memory.
- 3. Don’t call in heavy traffic, poor road conditions or bad weather:** Don’t accept or make calls if traffic, weather or road conditions would make it unsafe to do so. Also, even if the traffic conditions are light, always tell the person you are speaking to that you’re driving and that you may have to end the call if driving conditions change.
- 4. Don’t engage in complex or emotional conversations:** If a call becomes complex or emotional tell the person you are speaking to that you are driving and suspend the call. Complex and emotive conversations on a mobile phone, or with other passengers, and driving don’t mix – they are distracting and can be dangerous.
- 5. Use message services to answer calls:** If a call is unnecessary or you consider it unsafe to answer at the time, don’t answer the call and let it divert to voicemail or an answering service.
- 6. Pull over safely if you stop to make a call:** If you choose to stop to answer or make a call or retrieve a message, pull over carefully in a safe area. Don’t stop where you could be a hazard to other vehicles, pedestrians or yourself.
- 7. Use your phone’s features to reduce the effort to make a call:** Carefully read your phone’s instruction manual and learn to use the speed dial and redial features of your phone. Also, if possible, use a phone with voice-activated dialing and automatic answering features to reduce the effort to make and receive a call.
- 8. Plan your trip and make calls when stationary:** Whenever possible plan your trip and try to make calls when stationary or during rest breaks in long trips.
- 9. Tell callers you’re driving while on the phone:** Always let the person you’re speaking to know that you are driving. This lets them know that you may not always respond immediately and reminds you that driving safely is your first priority.
- 10. In emergencies, use your phone to call for help:** Dial '000' or '112' in case of fire, traffic accident, road hazard or medical emergency. Both '000' and '112' are free calls, and will connect you to emergency services. Almost one third of all genuine calls to '000' are made from mobile phones.

---

**To arrange a media interview, contact:**

Geoff Hughes, AAMI Public Affairs Manager, ph 03 8520 1469 or 0413 483 591  
Samantha Murray, Public Relations Exchange, ph 03 9607 4500 or 0407 898 724