

# U.S. seeks voluntary limits on car touchscreens

Tom Krisher, AP Auto Writer

DETROIT (AP) -- U.S. traffic safety regulators are asking automakers to put stronger limits on how long drivers can use in-car touchscreens in an effort to curb distracted driving.

The voluntary guidelines unveiled Tuesday would restrict the amount of time it takes to perform a single function on the car's audio/visual systems to two seconds. And drivers would be limited to six screen touches in 12 seconds, reducing the time they can take their eyes off the road. The guidelines also would ban manual text entry and display of websites, social media, books and other text distractions while the car is moving.

"Distracted driving is unsafe, irresponsible. It can have devastating consequences," said Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood, who announced the guidelines along with National Highway Traffic Safety Administration Administrator David Strickland. The officials told reporters on a conference call that NHTSA has determined that over 3,000 people were killed in crashes that involved distracted driving in 2011 and more than 387,000 were hurt.

The guidelines would be phased in over three years, allowing automakers time to rework their electronic navigation and entertainment systems in order to comply, Strickland said. He said NHTSA has had great success with voluntary guidelines, but the agency would look at giving automakers incentives to comply.

Current guidelines from the auto industry allow drivers to read text and perform other more complex tasks while cars are moving at less than 5 mph, Strickland said. They also allow up to 10 screen touches for a total of 20 seconds with a driver's eyes off the road.

NHTSA also said that a study it conducted showed that tasks requiring drivers to look at touch screens or hand-held devices increase the risk of getting into a crash by three times. The study, however, did not find an increased risk of a crash from just talking on a cell phone.

"The new guidelines and our ongoing work with our state partners across the country will help us put an end to the dangerous practice of distracted driving by limiting the amount of time drivers take their eyes off the road," Strickland said.

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