6 Distracted Walking Safety Tips



People are slowly starting to realize that using cell phones is dangerous not only while driving but also while simply walking.

Pedestrians have been known to walk into people or objects, step in front of traffic, fall off curbs, etc. when distracted by texting, talking or otherwise using their cell phones.

For example, we told you about two studies that found that cognitive distraction from the use of cell phones reduces situational awareness and increases unsafe behaviour, putting pedestrians at greater risk for accidents.

A recent health column in the *New York Times* mentions another study that found that distracted walkers veer off course by as much as 61% while texting and walking.

The number of injuries caused by distracted walking has increased so much that the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons released a public service announcement on so-called 'Digital Deadwalkers.'

To be safe and alert when walking, the Academy has these six safety tips you should pass along to workers:

1. If you must use headphones or other electronic devices, maintain a volume where you can still hear the sounds of traffic and your surroundings.

2. If you need to talk to someone next to you, make a phone call, text or do anything that could distract you from getting where you need to go safely, stop and do so away from the pedestrian traffic flow.
3. While you walk, focus on the people, objects and obstacles around you.
4. Don't jaywalk. Cross streets carefully, preferably at a traffic light, remaining cognizant of the pedestrian traffic flow, and the vehicles and bikes in and near the road.
5. Look up, not down, especially when stepping off or onto curbs or in the middle of major intersections; and/or when walking on or approaching stairs or escalators.
6. Stay alert in parking lots, and on and near streets, especially during the winter months when it gets dark earlier and drivers aren't as likely to see you.

The above tips also apply in the workplace. In other words, you should bar workers from using cell phones not only when they're operating vehicle or powered mobile equipment but also when they're on the job site, plant floor, warehouse, etc. And remind them to stay alert and aware of their surroundings at all times.

To protect workers from all of the distractions that can be caused by cell phones and other electronic devices, the OHS Insider has additional articles, resources and tools, including:

- An article on the dangers of texting while driving
- A briefing for senior management on company liability for distracted driving accidents
- A Model Distracted Driving Policy
- A Music Device Policy.