

iPod use while driving is dangerously distracting

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

New road safety research suggests that scrolling through music selections on MP3 players while driving is just as distracting as text messaging or entering details into a navigation system.

Researchers at the Monash University Accident Research Centre

(MUARC) who undertook the world-first study argue that vehicles should include system lockouts to restrict access to long lists of [music](#) while the vehicle is moving.

Forty one percent of drivers who own a [portable music](#) player reported using it while driving, according to a MUARC study from 2010.

Dr Kristie Young, who conducted both studies with Associate Professor Michael Lenne and others, said the operation of these devices – which can involve scrolling through literally thousands of songs – was visually demanding, particularly those tasks that require drivers to navigate through complex menu structures and lists.

"The potential for [driver distraction](#) is significant," Dr Young said.

In the study 37 drivers aged between 18 and 48 years completed a Driver Distraction Test while performing music selection on an iPod Touch. Using eye tracking equipment the researchers studied the amount of time and frequency that the drivers' eyes were moved away from looking at the road.

It was found that – regardless of the length of the list on the device – engaging in music searches on a touch screen has significant impact on a range of driving measures including an increase in lane excursions (going outside the lane and into adjacent lanes) up to 111 per cent more than those who did not use a device. These figures are equivalent to dialling a mobile phone, text messaging or entering details into a [navigation system](#).

Scrolling for music also affected a driver's ability to maintain distance to the car in front, through failing to detect changes in the front vehicles speed.

When using an iPod, drivers spent an average 2.5 times longer with their eyes off the road than when driving undistracted. However, they compensated by taking a larger number of off-road glances of "less than one second" with only 7 per cent actually looking at their iPod for more than two seconds, the threshold at which crash and near-crashes increases.

"However there is evidence that these strategies are not always sufficient to prevent a crash," Dr Young said.

Dr Young suggested that car makers should consider mandatory system lockouts that prevent the device being used once the car is in motion. Or improving the interface design "so that drivers can gain access to items in long lists faster and with less visual demand," she said.

This could include [drivers](#) specifying the first letter of the search item, for example B, and then the device only allowing access to songs or contacts starting with the letter B.

Data shows that nearly 6000 people were admitted to hospital in road crashes in 2012 in Victoria alone, with nearly 1000 of these people hospitalised for at least 14 days.

Provided by Monash University

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