

THE FIELD POLL

THE INDEPENDENT AND NON-PARTISAN SURVEY
OF PUBLIC OPINION ESTABLISHED IN 1947 AS
THE CALIFORNIA POLL BY MERVIN FIELD

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ALMOST EVERYBODY (94%) FEELS THAT CELL PHONE USAGE WHILE DRIVING INCREASES THE RISK OF ACCIDENTS. ALMOST TWO-THIRDS (63%) SAY THAT DRIVERS 75 AND OVER ARE LESS SAFE THAN OTHERS.

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By Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

How safe is the use of cellular phones while driving? An overwhelming majority (94%) of all California adults, including 91% of car drivers who use a cell phone when they are behind the wheel, believe the use of cell phones while driving increases the risk of having an accident.

On another driving safety matter, almost two thirds (63%) of the public believe that compared to others, those who are age 75 and over are generally less safe drivers. And, more than eight out of ten (83%) would favor a law requiring drivers 75 and older to take a behind the wheel road test before being re-licensed.

In a statewide survey completed in August, *The Field Poll* found that 88% of all California adults are registered to drive a car and that 20% of them say that they use a cell phone while driving either a lot (6%) or some of the time (14%).

There appears to be greater usage of a cell phone while driving among men and people less than 60 years of age. Just 4% of drivers over 60 say they use a cell phone a lot or some of the time while driving.

Huge majorities of the public — 95% of all drivers, 88% of non-drivers, as well as 91% of those who use a cell phone while driving — believe that using a cell phone while driving increases the risk of accidents.

Table 1
Frequency of using a cell phone while driving
(among licensed drivers)

	<u>A lot</u>	<u>Some of the time</u>	<u>Rarely</u>	<u>Never</u>
Statewide	6%	14	24	56
<u>Gender</u>				
Men	8%	14	25	53
Women	3%	15	24	58
<u>Age</u>				
18-29*	2%	18	29	51
30-39	9%	20	29	42
40-59	7%	14	26	53
60 or older*	1%	3	9	87

* small sample base

Table 2
Does using a cell phone while driving
increase risk of accidents?
(among all adults)

	<u>Increases risk</u>	<u>Does not increase risk</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
Statewide	94%	5	1
<u>Driving</u>			
Drivers	95%	4	1
Non-driver**	88%	11	1
<u>Use cell phone while driving</u>			
A lot/some**	91%	8	1
Rarely	95%	5	*
Never	96%	2	2

* less than 1/2 of 1%

** small sample base

Drivers 75 and older considered to be less safe drivers

Almost two-thirds of all California adults believe that drivers who are 75 or older are less safe than other drivers on the road. A little more than one in four (28%) think the older age group drivers are just as safe, while 5% believe they are more safe. Another 4% have no opinion.

Two-thirds or more of Californians in all age groups up to age 60 believe that 75 and older drivers are less safe than others. Among adults age 60 to 74, 2% feel older drivers are more safe, 45% say they are less safe, and 47% believe that they are just as safe as others.

Among those 75 and over, opinions are evenly divided, with 27% believing drivers in their own age category are less safe, 24% saying they are more safe and 36% believing they are about as safe as other drivers.

When it comes to taking a behind-the-wheel road test before being re-licensed, greater than eight in ten (83%) of all adults favor the idea. While there is somewhat less support, a two-thirds majority of both people age 60-74 and those age 75 and over endorse the road test idea.

Table 3
Compared to other drivers, how safe are drivers age 75 or older?
(among all adults)

	Less safe	About as safe/ no difference	More safe	No opinion
Statewide	63%	28	5	4
<u>Gender</u>				
Men	62%	29	6	3
Women	64%	27	5	4
<u>Age</u>				
18-29**	63%	32	5	*
30-39	79%	15	4	2
40-59	65%	28	3	4
60-74**	45%	47	2	6
75 or older**	27%	36	24	12

* less than 1/2 of 1%

** small sample base

Table 4
**Opinion about a proposed law to require drivers 75 and older
to take behind-the-wheel road test before being re-licensed**
(among all adults)

	Favor	Oppose	No opinion
Statewide	83%	16	1
<u>Gender</u>			
Men	83%	16	1
Women	83%	16	1
<u>Age</u>			
18-29**	85%	14	1
30-39	92%	7	1
40-59	83%	15	2
60-74**	67%	33	*
75 or over**	68%	30	2

* less than 1/2 of 1%

** small sample base

Legislature considering a road test bill for unsafe drivers

Earlier this year, State Senator Tom Hayden introduced a bill which proposed to make driving tests mandatory for Californians age 75 and older saying it would reduce accident risks.

Supporters of the measures cited statistics which demonstrate that as motorists advance through their 70's they are increasingly likely to have accidents. For drivers 85 and older the accident rate is far higher than other drivers.

The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) and many legislators strongly opposed the measure calling it discriminatory because it would be based solely on age without considering the health status of the driver.

Opponents pointed out that only one state, Illinois, singles out elderly drivers for road tests. In that state all drivers 75 and older must pass such tests to renew their licenses and drivers 80 and older must apply for renewals more frequently than younger drivers.

After considerable debate in the Senate, the bill was amended to call for testing groups of drivers considered to be at high accident risk regardless of age. However, this bill was subsequently withdrawn, although its sponsor has stated that he intends to re-introduce the bill again next year.

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Information About the Survey

Sample Details

The results in this report are based on a telephone survey conducted August 16-22, 1999 among a representative statewide sample of 496 California adults. The survey was completed by telephone in English and Spanish using random digit dialing methods. The sample sizes of subgroups reported in this release are as follows: men (259), women (237), age 18-29 (89), age 30-39 (103), age 40-59 (195), age 60-74 (77), age 75 or older (31), drivers (440), non-drivers (56), use a cell phone while driving a lot or some (89), use a cell phone while driving rarely (102), never use a cell phone while driving (248).

According to statistical theory, 95% of the time results from the overall adult public sample would have a sampling error of +/- 4.5 percentage points.

There are many possible sources of error in any survey other than sampling variability. Different results could occur because of differences in question wording, sequencing or through undetected errors or omission in sampling, interviewing or data processing. Every effort was made to minimize such errors.

Questions Asked

Do you yourself have a driver's license? (IF YES) How often do you use a cellular phone while driving -- a lot, some of the time, rarely or never?

Generally speaking, do you think that using a cellular phone while driving increases the risk of having an accident or not?

On another driving-related matter...

Do you think that as a group, drivers age 75 or older are less safe drivers, more safe drivers, or are about as safe as other drivers on the road today?

Generally, when renewing a drivers license in California, drivers are not required to take a behind-the-wheel road test. A bill has been proposed in the state legislature to change this so that drivers age 75 or older would be required to take a behind-the-wheel road test every few years before being re-licensed. Do you favor or oppose this idea?