



Distracted **DRIVING**

Tips for Staying Safe Behind the Wheel

The Impact

Distracted driving is near the top of the list of safety issues on our roadways today. Texts, phone calls, emails, music, food and drinks — the list of distractions hampering American drivers goes on and on.

Defined as any activity that affects you visually, manually or cognitively while behind the wheel, distracted driving can lead to dangerous and deadly consequences.

That's because driving requires our full attention, not only for routine travel but also for those situations that require rapid, sudden maneuvers. Using our cell phones, reading a map, applying makeup, writing or adjusting the radio are just a few more common distractions that can lead to unintended and avoidable accidents.

ARE WE SAFE ON THE ROADS?

More than 80 percent of drivers cite distraction as a serious problem and a behavior that makes them feel less safe on the road, according to the annual AAA Foundation Traffic Safety Culture Index.

The AAA (formerly the American Automobile Association) also reports that half of all respondents say they feel less safe than they did five years ago.

A REAL ISSUE

These fears of more dangerous roadways are not unfounded. Federal estimates report that distraction



© FOTOLIA

contributes to 16 percent of all fatal crashes, says the AAA. This leads to 5,000 deaths per year.

Teenagers are particularly at risk. A recent AAA Foundation in-car study showed that teen drivers were

distracted about 25 percent of the time. Of this group, a large portion of the distractions were attributed to electronic devices. Behaviors like texting, emails and downloading music fit in this category.

THE IMPACT

More wrecks and more deaths are at the root of what transportation professionals, community groups and lawmakers are focused on curbing with new distracted driv-

ing legislation.

The impact on our economy also is great, as reported by a Virginia Tech study. The research estimates that cell phone-related crashes in the United States cause about \$43 billion in damages each year.

The Timeline

For many drivers across the nation, 2009 was a turning point in the battle against distracted driving. That's when President Barack Obama issued his first executive order on the matter.

His action led to a snowball effect in terms of various federal agencies enacting their own laws on distracted driving, eventually leading to major change in many state laws as well.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, here is how the president and federal agencies have impacted the behavior.

- On September 30, 2009, President Obama issued an executive order prohibiting federal employees from texting while driving on government business or while using government equipment;
- On September 17, 2010, the Federal Railroad Administration banned cell phone and electronic device use of employees on the job;
- On October 27, 2010, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration enacted a ban that prohibits commercial vehicle drivers from texting while driving; and
- In 2011, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration and the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration banned all hand-held cell phone use by commercial drivers and drivers carrying hazardous materials.

STATES FOLLOW SUIT

States first began to get involved in the issue in 2001 when New York instituted the first ban on using hand-held cell phones while driving. In 2007, Washington became the first state to enact an all-driver ban on texting.

A new crop of studies were conducted in the early 2000s as cell phone usage reached new highs across the United States. These efforts helped bring attention to the matter and accelerated action at the federal and state levels.

One of the most influential studies, according to the Association for the Advancement of Automotive Medicine, was the 2006 initiative by the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute. This study revealed that drivers engaging in visually and or manually complex tasks have a three times higher near-crash or crash risk than drivers who are attentive.

Other findings from this study included the risk of a crash or near-crash event being:

- 2.8 times higher when dialing a cell phone;
- 1.4 times higher when using or reaching for an electronic device; and
- 1.3 times higher when talking or listening to a cell phone.



Texting While Driving

Since text messaging is a relatively new issue in the world of driving laws, the ramifications of doing so are not yet universal.

Texting while driving is banned for all drivers in 45 states and the District of Columbia, according to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. Additionally, novice drivers are banned from the activity in Missouri, Oklahoma and Texas.

Some drivers are still legally allowed to text while driving according to their state law, under specific circumstances.

In Texas, for example, drivers in school crossing zones and on public school property during the time reduced speed limit applies are banned from texting while driving. Drivers over 18 not in these areas, however, are allowed to text while driving. But many localities within Texas have enacted their own bans on using cell phones to text while driving.

You can see how this non-uniform approach could be confusing.

Check out the IIHS color-coded map on the organization's website (www.iihs.org) to find out where your state stands. Contact your local Secretary of State to find out how any related laws impact your city or county.

A DANGEROUS ACTIVITY

Even though we can't all



© FOTOLIA

seem to agree on the legality of texting while driving, we all should pay attention to the statistics.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and its “Stop

the Texts, Stop the Wrecks” advertising campaign:

- You are three times more likely to crash your vehicle if you text while driving;
- 49 percent of adults say they have been passengers in

a car when the driver was sending or reading text messages on their cell phone;

- 68 percent of teens and young adults disagreed that it is easy to text while driving and still pay attention to the

road; and

- 78 percent of teens and young adults say they have read a text message while driving, while 71 percent say they have composed and sent one.

GPS Devices

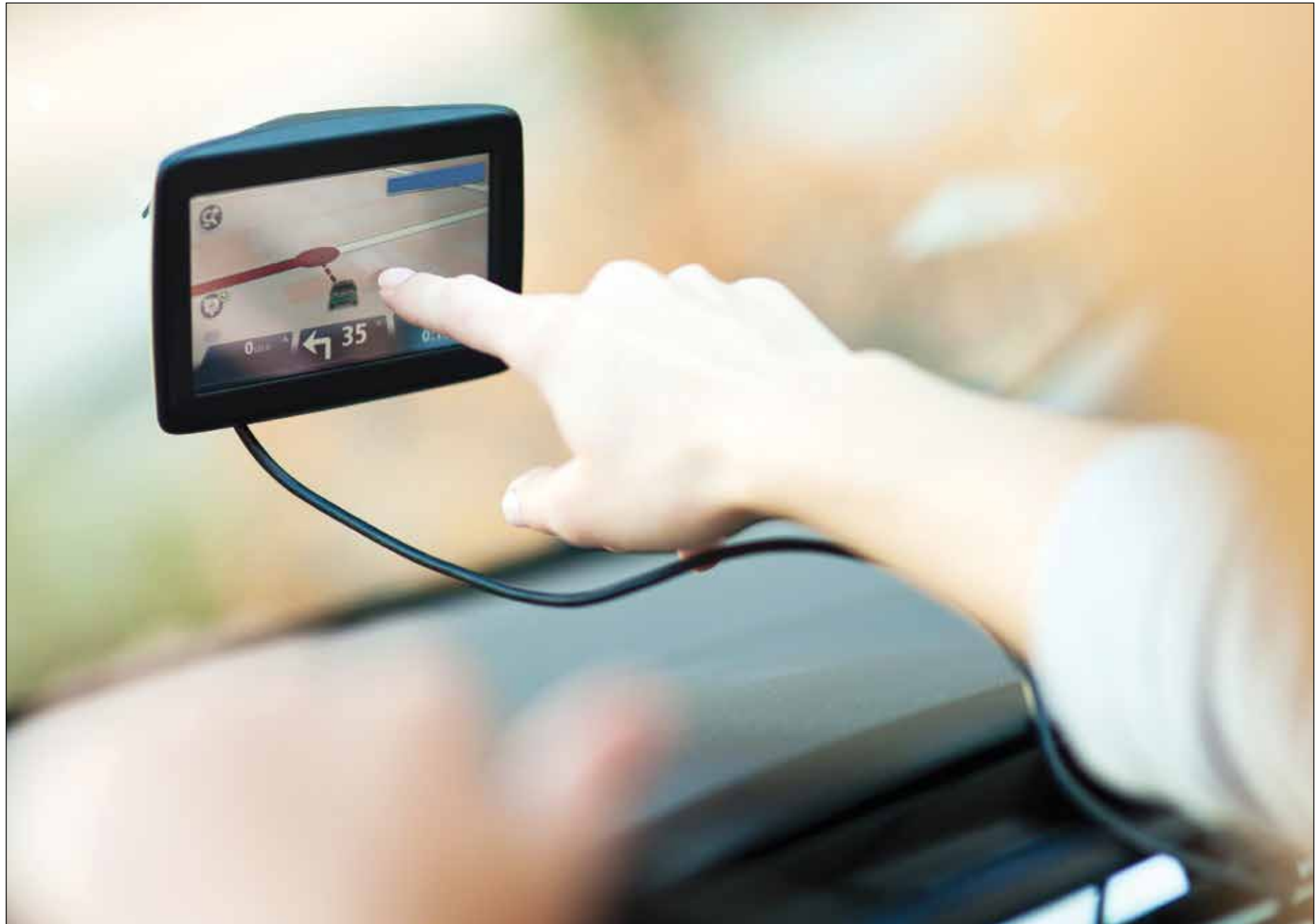
What's the point of knowing exactly where you're going if you're not going to make it there safely?

GPS navigation units help us traverse parts unknown. If you keep your unit map updated, it can help you circumvent high-construction zones or even major traffic jams.

Can you imagine making a cross-country trip without one?

Although GPS units are invaluable to today's drivers, tinkering with them is one of the leading roadway distractions today. It takes time to program the right address or business name into the unit — time that can take away from you paying attention to the road.

While GPS devices are covered under many distracted-driving laws, how you use them may not be. If you're depending on your smartphone to run a map application, police officers may pull you over if it looks like you're using your phone for a conversation.



WHEN TO PROGRAM YOUR GPS UNIT

If you depend on your GPS to find your destination, program your target address before you leave the house or have a passenger help. If you plan to make multiple stops along the way, plan your route and program all possible stops.

MOUNT THE GPS

If you keep your device mounted securely to your dash, you may be less apt to use it while driving. Always

pull over safely to a gas station or rest stop to program your unit if you're driving by yourself.

This gives you the opportunity to fully focus on input-

ting the correct destination address, without the added stress of dealing with traffic signs and other drivers.

Many new cars offer on-board GPS units that

allow you to speak your directions aloud. This can help you keep your eyes on the road while your unit handles your travel logistics for you.

Phone Conversations

Sometimes, the statistics say it all. According to a AAA study, drivers talking on cell phones are four times more likely to be involved in a vehicle crash than drivers who are not distracted.

A University of Utah study showed that talking on a cell phone has a greater effect on reaction time than having a blood alcohol level of the legal limit of .08.

But why is talking on your phone while driving such a dangerous activity? The answer is a complicated one comprised of issues both psychological and physical.

THE DANGERS

Two types of cell phone behavior typically lead to unsafe driving conditions, and it may surprise you which one can have a greater impact on your driving.

These classifications of cell phone usage are:

- Handling the phone, which includes dialing, answering, text messaging and using it for GPS navigation. If your hands are on your phone, it means they aren't on the wheel.

- Conversations, which can be just as dangerous, as studies have shown your mental commitment to a phone call is demanding, even if you may not realize it.

EMOTIONAL ENGAGEMENT

The National Safety Council reports that in simu-



lated driving tests, drivers who were asked to carry on a cell phone conversation were so distracted that they went unaware of some traffic signals.

The study compared phone conversations to other related

activities such as listening to audio books and news radio, stating that these types of activities are less emotionally engaging, hence safer to do while driving.

The more emotionally engaged the subject, the

study found, the less attentive he or she was to safety signals.

Digging a little deeper, the results were unaffected by whether the subject manually held the phone or if the mechanism was hands free.

This means that even if you're following the law by using a hands-free device, you may still find yourself in a situation where you're unable to react quickly enough to a dangerous situation.

How Technology Can Help

The proliferation of technology into our everyday activities is blamed for much of the issues related to distracted driving.

As teen drivers rely on their cell phones more than ever before, it may sound counter-productive to suggest that technology can help keep more of the safe on the roadways.

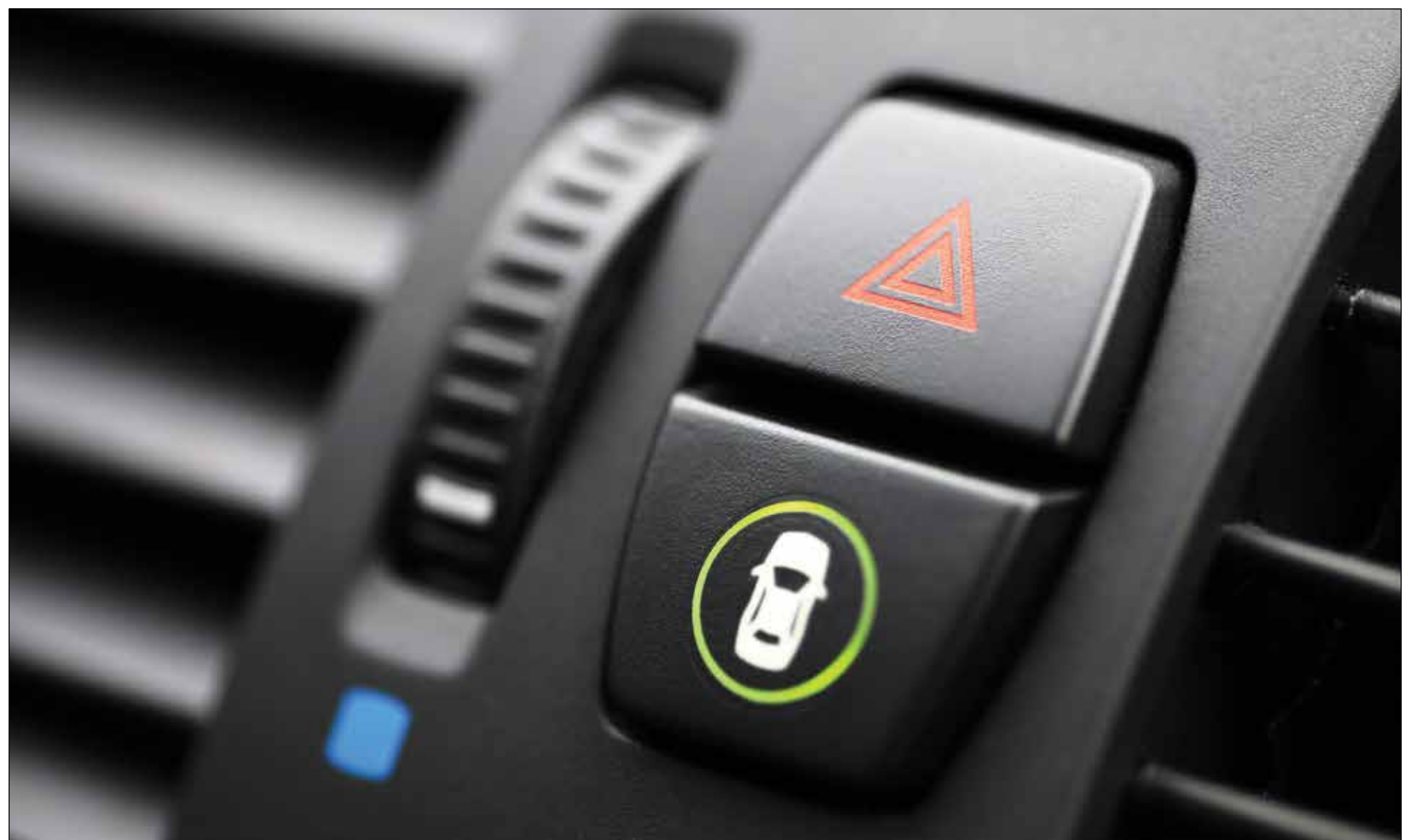
But many new devices are proving otherwise. Automobile manufacturers are engineering their newest concepts with safety in mind. In fact, the overall features of new cars may look much different in 20 years than today's models, even if the external appearances remain largely unchanged.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, federal government and other road safety groups across the world are also working to make distracted driving a thing of the past. Major initiatives are underway, including an innovative \$30 million project to expand the Vehicle Research Center in Ruckersville, Va.

An enlarged outdoor track at the expanded center provides ample space for high-speed maneuvers and accurate evaluation of front crash prevention systems. More intensive testing like this will help driver safety advance to new levels.

CRASH PREVENTION

The major solution to distracted driving may already here: technology that inter-



© FOTOLIA

venes for drivers when they aren't paying attention.

Drivers get into fewer crashes when their vehicles are equipped with front crash prevention systems, and new technology is on the way to connect vehicles to each other and roadway infrastructure to alleviate crashes.

Crash avoidance features

such as autonomous braking or out-of-lane alerts can make a difference in helping correct common driving behaviors caused by distractions.

FUTURE TECHNOLOGY

A group of federal and

state agencies, research organizations and automakers is developing vehicle-to-vehicle and vehicle-to-infrastructure communications platforms, which, according to the NHTSA, could potentially address about 80 percent of crashes involving non-impaired drivers.

The technology would allow cars to communicate with each other and roadway infrastructure to help ease congestion and avoid accidents.

The NHTSA is working on how vehicle-to-vehicle communication technology would roll out to passenger vehicles. Stay tuned.

How Adults Can Help

As with many major issues, addressing distracted driving starts at home. Parents can make a major impact on the driving habits of their children, especially if they have teenagers with little experience on the road.

This can start by simply leading by example. Your children are watching your every move — even when it comes to driving.

Are you constantly distracted by incoming phone calls, text messages or emails? Do you occasionally break the law by sending a text message or answering your phone while driving?

These behaviors might seem minor to you but you're setting a pattern of behavior that could be followed by your children.

You can lead by example by ignoring incoming phone alerts. Tell your children that you just received a text, but you're waiting until you reach your destination to check and reply to it.

TALK ABOUT THE ISSUE

When you see a story on the news covering the topic of a teenager's death due to distracted driving, don't change the channel. Call in your children to talk about what happened. How could the accident have been avoided? What actions might the victim have been able to take to keep himself or herself safer on the road?

Honest dialogue about what kind of damage distracted driving can cause is the



first step to stemming the behavior. Who knows, the next time your child thinks about checking her texts while driving, she may just remember your words of wisdom and choose to wait until she safely

reaches her destination.

TEACH DEFENSIVE DRIVING

Not every victim of an acci-

dent caused by distracted driving is the one actually answering a phone call or sending a text. That's why it's important to teach your children to be heads-up drivers.

Watch for oncoming traffic

at all times, especially at intersections or on hilly, rural roads. Teach your young drivers to trust only themselves on the road and to be ready for others who may not be paying attention.