

## October 2009 Hot Topic

### Subject: Distracted Driving

Distracted driving, especially texting while driving, has been a hot topic nationwide and in Utah. US Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood recently completed a national two-day Distracted Driving Summit. What does Utah crash data show in regards to distracted driving?

#### How Big a Problem is Texting?

At the end of September 2009 there have been four known deaths ever in Utah involving texting while driving. Two of the deaths were from one crash when James Furfaro and Keith O'Dell died after being hit by Reggie Shaw who was texting and driving in September 2006. Another death occurred in February 2007 when a texting driver was struck by a police officer in pursuit of another vehicle. In August 2009 a texting driver was killed when he tried to swerve around a vehicle that was stopped at a red light. Over the last four years Utah averages one death a year from texting drivers. In comparison, since the first death related to texting there have been 91 pedestrians killed and over 370 deaths that were speed-related.

#### What About Cell Phones?

In regards to drivers using cell phones (which also includes texting drivers) there have been three deaths so far this year. In 2008 there were four deaths, both 2007 and 2006 saw five deaths, and 2005 had two deaths. The 19 deaths involving drivers on cell phones over the last five years averages to four deaths a year (see chart on page 2).

#### How Many Crashes in Utah Involve Driver Distraction?

Since 2006, driver distraction has been a variable on the DI-9 form. Where driver distraction is known, approximately 12% of crashes in Utah involve a distracted driver. Since 2006 distracted driving crashes have been decreasing. Distracted driving crashes accounted for 12.2% of crashes in 2006, decreased to 11.7% of crashes in 2007, and 2008 preliminary data shows another decrease to 10.6% of crashes. If the current trend continues, distracted driving crashes would represent 9.9% of crashes in 2009 (see chart on page 3).

#### What are the Leading Distractions?

Over the last three years there have been 16,532 distracted driving crashes, approximately 5,500 a year. Cell phone accounted for 18.1% of the distractions, followed by passengers at 9.5%, radio/CD/DVD at 8.9%, and other electronic device at 3.7%. "Other" distraction accounted for 59.8% of the distractions. Because of the high number of "other" marked in the "Driver Distraction" variable, I would recommend that we modify this variable. I would propose that we replace "Other" with "Other Distraction Inside Vehicle" and "Distraction Outside Vehicle." We may also want to consider whether or not it would be useful to include "Texting" as an option.

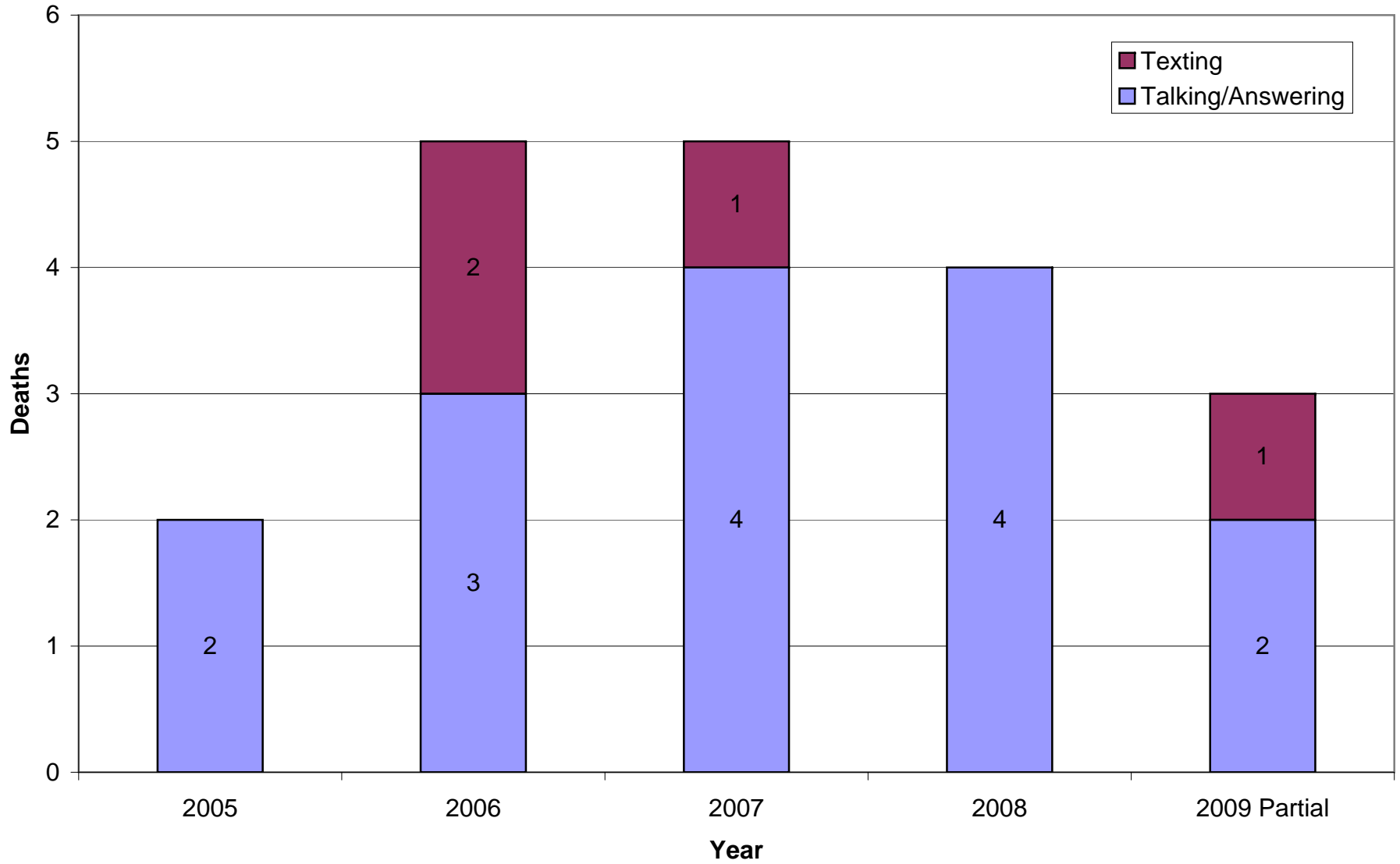
#### Who are the Distracted Drivers?

One-fourth of distracted drivers in crashes in 2007 were teenagers. The older the driver the less likely they were to be distracted. The majority (56%) of distracted drivers in 2007 were under 30 years old (see chart on page 4). Distracted drivers were also 81% less likely to wear their seatbelt compared to other drivers.

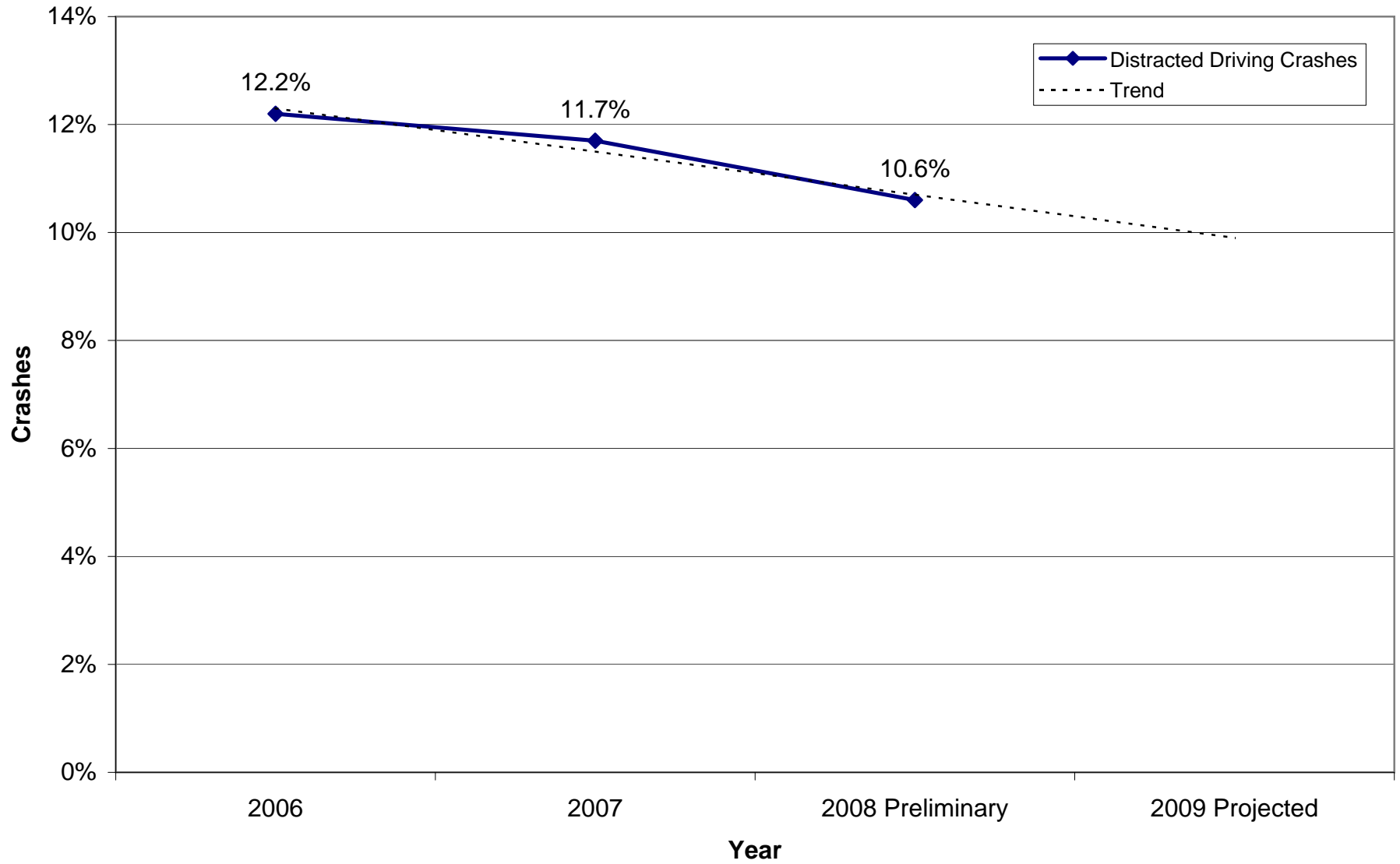
#### How Complete is the Data?

While these numbers are significant, they may not state the true size of the problem, since the identification of distraction and its role in the crash by law enforcement can be very difficult.

### Deaths Involving Drivers Using Cell Phones, Utah 2005-2009



**Percent of Crashes Involving a Distracted Driver, Utah 2006-2008**



Distracted Driver Crash Rates by Age, Utah 2007

