

People won't stop texting and walking

By AJ Vicens, Mother Jones

Last year, it was reported that a small city in China had created a texting-only lane for pedestrians. The story went viral before it was somewhat debunked—turns out the lane is in a theme park, and it's just 100 feet long—but there's a reason it got eyeballs: everybody's worried about "texting while walking," and no one knows what to do about it.

According to a 2012 Pew study, most grownups have bumped into stuff while looking at their phones, or been bumped by someone else on their phone. A Stony Brook University study in 2012 found that texting walkers were 61 percent more likely to veer off course than undistracted ones, a finding backed up by other researchers.

Greatest "hits" compilations abound on YouTube. One woman tumbled into a mall fountain, another off a pier. A man nearly collided with a roaming bear. While pride suffered most in those cases, more than 1,500 pedestrians landed in emergency rooms due to a cell-phone related distracted walking injury in 2010—a nearly 500 percent jump since 2005—according to a recent study from Ohio State University.

Jack Nasar, professor of urban planning at Ohio State University and one of the study's co-authors, said the real number of injuries could be much, much higher. "Not every pedestrian who gets injured while using a cell phone goes to an emergency room," he told Mother Jones. Some lack health insurance or (erroneously) decide their injuries aren't serious. Others will deny a phone had anything to do with their injury. "People who die from cell-phone distraction also don't show up in the emergency room numbers," says Nasar.

Of course, pedestrians aren't the only ones with their noses in their phones. According to a 2013 University of Nebraska Medical Center study, the rate of pedestrians getting hit by distracted drivers grew by about 45 percent between 2005 and 2010. The good news is that 44 states, Washington D.C., and Puerto Rico have banned texting and driving for all drivers, but the bad news is that texting and walking is potentially more dangerous and has proved harder to ban.

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