



The U.S. Department of Transportation have released their long-awaited guidelines on distracted driving, calling on automakers to disable drivers' manual access to social media, websites, text, and email messages while driving.

The recommendations, which can be [downloaded from DOT \(PDF\)](#), also seek to prevent any in-car technology that requires a driver to use both hands or take the eyes off the road for more than two seconds.

"Increasingly, data shows that as technology evolves, cell phones aren't the only potential distraction in vehicles," says Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood, who has made distracted driving his signature safety issue. "Many carmakers are now developing in-vehicle electronic systems that can give directions, post to social networking sites, and search the Internet."

Gloria Bergquist, a spokeswoman for the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, said the trade group is generally supportive of the agency's guidelines. The Alliance, which represents 12 major carmakers, is concerned that the move won't be well received by consumers, Bergquist said.

The guidelines are voluntary, meaning automakers won't be penalized or suffer a safety downgrade if they don't comply. The agency chose to make compliance optional to give regulators more flexibility in keeping with the pace of fast-evolving technologies. Also, the guidelines don't apply to aftermarket or driver-supplied devices or systems.

NHTSA chief David L Strickland says the agency hopes automakers will make compliance with the guidelines a selling point to consumers, as they do with other safety ratings. In 2010, distracted driving deaths totaled 3,092, but NHTSA believes the total could be higher because drivers are often unwilling to admit to the behaviour and many crashes lack witnesses.