

SAFETY CONCERNS

Two billboard industry-sponsored studies claim that electronic billboards are safe.

In July 2007 two billboard industry-sponsored studies concluded that digital billboards are no more likely to cause traffic accidents than conventional billboards.

Industry representatives cite these reports often including here in LaX County where they have been handed out to city council and county board members.

The Maryland State Highway Administration commissioned a study finding the billboard industry-sponsored studies to be highly flawed.

In his report, highly regarded safety expert, Jerry Wachtel, was highly critical of the assumptions and decisions guiding the research, the methodology, review and application of cited literature, statistics, and conclusions of both studies.

Comments from safety expert, Jerry Wachtel, about the dangers of billboards and signs:

- But billboards are the only roadside objects that are both intentionally distracting and irrelevant to the task at hand. They are typically placed where driving conditions are challenging, and distraction can cause drivers to drift into another lane or fail to notice a car stopping ahead.
- a two-second distraction of any kind more than doubles the risk of a crash or near crash.
- drivers take their eyes off the road for two seconds or longer twice as often when they are looking at digital advertising signs than when they are looking at traditional billboards— or no billboards at all.
- So why do we look? A lot of it has to do with physiology and the ease with which human beings can be enticed by bright lights. This is the so-called "moth effect," technically a variant of phototropism.
- Billboard designers have access to the same human factors studies that guide the makers of official signs. But their motives are different. They want to attract the driver's attention long enough to get their (sometimes complex) message across, with bright colors and splashy typography. They may include telephone numbers, web addresses, even text message codes — all requiring longer and more frequent glances. And, since the billboards are designed to attract as many viewers as possible, they tend to be placed at the very locations where official signs are avoided, such as the apex of a curve or the intersection of two roadways. Finally, they are often placed very close together, making it hard for drivers to focus on the task at hand.
- Digital sign technology is advancing faster than policy makers can deal with it. The newest technologies focus on capturing the motorist's attention in ever more sophisticated ways, raising new questions for regulators and privacy advocates. Among new technologies are personalized messages, interactive displays, facial recognition, and automated license plate recognition. In addition to safety issues, these technologies provide powerful tools for advertisers - and raise concerns about privacy for drivers.

Excerpts from Digital Billboards, Distracted Drivers, Wachtel, Planning - March 2011 and Digital Billboards, Distracted Drivers, Jerry Wachtel, Planning - 2007

From the Scenic America Website under Billboards are a Safety Hazard

Even the Outdoor Advertising Association of America boasts, "You can't zap it. You can't ignore it." Billboards are designed to distract motorists' attention from the road.