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Vehicle Infotainment Systems Drive Senior Motorists to Distraction

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Older drivers are distracted more than 8 seconds longer than their younger counterparts when they use certain in-car infotainment systems.

But it's not because they're older, reports new AAA Research; it's because the technology is hard to use and poorly designed.

— *an announcement from AAA Northeast*

Voice commands for calling, texting, navigating, or tuning radios in one of six infotainment systems caused 55- to 75-year old drivers, on average, to divert their eyes from the road longer than 21- to-36-year old drivers, reports the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, the research arm of AAA.

“Voice command functions in new cars certainly have the potential to extend the mobility of older drivers,” said Fran Mayko, AAA Northeast spokeswoman. “But poor design, complex systems and in-car position that make it difficult to easily complete simple tasks are causing more harm than good to older drivers.”

For any driver, no matter the age, taking your eyes off the road for just two seconds doubles your crash risk, she added.

The research — a collaboration between the AAA Foundation and the University of Utah — found older adults, who took between 5 and 9 seconds to complete in-car tasks on these infotainment systems, experienced slower response times and more visual distractions, even though these systems created potentially unsafe distractions for **all** drivers.

It's critical that car manufacturers find ways to design less-demanding systems to improve driver comfort and safety since older drivers are becoming the fastest growing demographic in the U.S., Mayko said. In fact, within the next decade, more than 1 in 5 drivers on the road will be over 65.

“Complex in-car technology is a design problem, not an age problem,” Mayko pointed out. “Designing systems to meet the safety and comfort needs of aging drivers would benefit all of us.”

Researchers tested the visual and cognitive demand created by infotainment systems in six 2018 vehicles on the two driver age groups when they used voice commands, touch screens and other interactive technologies to call, text, tune radios or program navigation, all while driving.

The vehicles included: the Volvo XC9, the Audi A6 Premium, the Nissan Pathfinder SI, the Lincoln Navigator, the Mazda CZ-5, and the Cadillac CT6.

This latest study is the seventh phase of ground-breaking distracted driving research by AAA and the University of Utah. Visit AAA.com/distraction for information on the full study and the previous research.