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Clemson builds hands-free texting alternative

THE JOURNAL STAFF

CLEMSON — Clemson University researchers have developed a hands-free alternative to cell phone texting while driving.

"If you can't keep people from doing it, make it safer," said Juan Gilbert, professor and chairman of the human-centered computing division of Clemson's School of Computing.

He said one problem with banning texting while driving is that people are likely to continue doing it. He said it will be difficult for police to enforce a ban unless they actually see someone in the act. Gilbert said evidence of texting while driving often surfaces only after an accident.

Gilbert's team developed an application called VoiceTEXT, that allows drivers to speak text messages and keep their eyes on the road at the same time. Drivers using VoiceTEXT put their cell phones in Bluetooth mode and connect it to their car.

"Through the car's speaker system or through the driver's own Bluetooth headset, drivers can give a voice command that delivers a text message," Gilbert said. "So you can speak to your phone and tell it to send a message to an individual. The recipient's phone recognizes the voice as a text message and the other person is able to respond appropriately."

The National Highway Transportation Safety Administration reports that 80 percent of crashes and 65 percent of near-crashes involve driver distraction. Cell phone use is among the reasons for driver distraction, the agency says.