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Distracted Driving and the Risks of Ride-Hailing Services Like Uber

By **Matt Richtel** December 21, 2014 7:00 am

It Can Wait. The buzz phrase, popularized by AT&T in a public service campaign, urges drivers to show restraint with their phones.

But a growing number of drivers who make their living behind the wheel can't wait. These are the drivers for Uber and its competitors, including taxi services, who, to make money, must respond nearly instantly to their smartphones, without regard to road conditions or safety.

When a service call comes in from Uber — by way of a loud beeping on the phone — a driver typically has 15 seconds to tap the phone to accept the fare. That can mean looking at the phone, seeing how far away the customer is and then making a decision. Failure to respond in 15 seconds means the fare goes to a different driver. In some cities, including New York, failure to respond to several calls in a row can lead to Uber's temporarily suspending a driver.

You need not be a neuroscientist or safety advocate to see the potential for danger when the phone, a potential source of driver distraction, becomes an essential means of transaction. But Uber is not alone, given that a similar system is used by Lyft and, arguably, an even more demanding one is used by a growing number of taxi drivers.

In San Francisco, the home of Uber and the hub of car-service innovation, taxi drivers use software called Flywheel that aims to allow competition

