

Risks of distracted driving

Experts: Lack of focus can lead to pedal errors and crashes

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PETALING JAYA: A car at a standstill suddenly lurches forward, slamming into a storefront, food stall or group of pedestrians.

It happens without warning and not everyone walks away.

Once dismissed as freak occurrences, such crashes are now happening with enough frequency to alarm the public and authorities.

Road Safety Council of Malaysia executive council member Datuk Suret Singh said these sudden and uncontrolled surges often occur because drivers lose focus behind the wheel.

He said distracted driving remains a leading cause of careless errors, including the all-too-common mistake of pressing the accelerator instead of the brake.

Suret stressed that driving demands full attention at all times, with motorists needing to keep their eyes and minds firmly focused on the road and their surroundings.

"The most common distraction is the mobile phone. A study by the Malaysian Institute of Road Safety Research found that up to 70% of drivers engage with their phones while driving.

"Such behaviour significantly



Uncontrolled surge: Driving demands full attention at all times.

raises the risk of crashes.

"Global studies estimate that between 10% and 30% of road accidents are linked to distracted driving," he said.

Suret said drivers should strictly limit phone use to navigation purposes, leaving messaging and other tasks to passengers.

He said drivers of vehicles with automatic transmissions should use only their right foot for both the accelerator and brake, as using both feet may increase the likelihood of pedal errors.

Universiti Putra Malaysia's Road Safety Research Centre head Assoc Prof Dr Law Teik Hua said such incidents are rarely the result of a single mistake.

He said confusing the accelerator for the brake, while relatively uncommon, is a recognised safety issue that often stems from a mix of human error, panic, vehicle characteristics and the surrounding environment.

"Experts call it pedal misapplication. In a sudden moment of stress or confusion, a driver may

step on the wrong pedal.

"When the vehicle responds by accelerating, it can trigger panic and cause the driver to press down even harder instead of releasing the pedal.

"This only worsens the situation within split seconds," Law said.

On Thursday, a woman in her 50s accidentally stepped on the car's accelerator and crashed into a laundry shop in Tumpat, Kelantan.

No casualties were reported.