

Cell phone safety while driving a vehicle

Use of a cell phone while driving has been banned in a number of cities in the United States and abroad. In the U.S., the use of cell phones while driving also has been banned at the state level in several states. The Governors Highway Safety Association® maintains a list of state and local restrictions on cellular phone use that can be found at: ghsa.org/html/stateinfo/laws/cellphone_laws.html

Why? Drivers need 100% of their attention to do one thing - operate the motor vehicle! This document discusses some of the hazards of cell phone use while driving an automotive vehicle.

Research results

Researchers at the University of Toronto found that the risk of having a traffic accident while using a cell phone is the same as that while driving drunk. Their study used 13 months of accident data and the phone records of 699 people to track the actual time of the accident and the phone call usage. They also made some statistical adjustments for driving habits.

The study showed that cell phone users were four times more likely to get into traffic accidents than those who do not use them. This is significant considering the fact that about 35 million Americans are currently cell phone users and that inattention is the #1 cause of accidents in America.

The study indicated that telephones that allowed the hands to be free did not appear to be safer than hand-held telephones. It went on to indicate that the main factor in most motor vehicle collisions is a driver's limitation in attention rather than dexterity. An editorial by Malcolm Macture of the Harvard School of Public Health and Murray Mittleman of Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center said the research was the first direct evidence that the use of cellular telephones in cars contributes to roadway collisions. The Toronto study by Dr. Donald Redelmeier and Robert Tibshirani said the risk "is similar to the hazard associated with driving with a blood alcohol level at the legal limit." Other universities have found similar results in recent studies as well.

Although the cellular phone industry took issue with the findings and felt that the study was flawed, there were additional benefits found in this research:

- The risk of an accident was nearly five times higher than normal when a person was on the telephone one minute or five minutes before the accident. The typical call in the study lasted nearly 2½ minutes.
- The collision rate was four times higher than expected when the call was made less than 15 minutes before the accident.
- Only after the driver had been off the phone for more than 15 minutes did the risk seem to dissipate.
- Younger and older drivers with a cell phone face the same risk.
- Subjects with many years of experience in using a cellular telephone still had a significant increase in risk, but the highest risk was among people who had not graduated from high school.

Legal ramifications

- Recent trends indicate that one of the first actions of plaintiff's attorneys following automobile accidents is to subpoena the cellular phone bills of the defendant.
- Several court cases involving the accusation of negligence while using a cell phone and driving have resulted in multi-million dollar awards.

Conclusion

Using a cell phone while driving may lead to an increased risk of having an accident through a lack of attention to driving duties. IT IS BETTER NOT TO DRIVE WHILE TALKING ON YOUR CELL PHONE! If the cell phone topic is important, then pull off the road and take care of it.

Research studies

The following includes access to additional studies conducted on the impact of in-car technologies, including cell phones, on driving distractions and performance.

- National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and Virginia Tech Transportation Institute, 100-Car Naturalistic Driving Study News Release.
- University of Utah, David Strayer, The Impact of Technologies on Driving Performance, a series of studies.

Note: A sample cell phone use policy is provided below.

Sample cell phone use policy

Accident statistics support that using a cellular phone, either a hand-held or a hands-free model while operating a motor vehicle, distracts a driver's attention from traffic conditions. To help reduce the possibility of vehicle accidents in connection with the use of cellular phones, our company has adopted a cellular phone policy that is applicable to all employees while driving a company vehicle at any time, or while driving any other vehicle (rented, leased, borrowed or their own vehicle) while conducting company business.

Our company's policy is as follows:

- Cellular phone calls, incoming or outgoing, are not allowed while driving.
- The cellular phone's voicemail feature should be on to store incoming calls while driving.
- All calls and message retrievals should be made after the vehicle is safely parked.
- Accidents incurred while the employee driver is using a cellular phone may be considered to be preventable, and the employee driver subject to disciplinary action.
- Hands-free cellular phones are subject to the same policy as the hand-held cellular phones.

I have read the above policy and will abide by it.

(Employee signature)

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