



Answer the Call to Safety - Not Your Cell Phone

Nearly every where you look, you can find someone using a cell phone while driving. What once was considered a luxury has now become a necessity. Many cell phones are also portable media devices with an array of distractions including video, music, games and Internet access. Many people don't give a second thought to driving with one hand on the wheel and one hand holding their cell phone, but some cities are cracking down.

Chicago is one of the latest cities to issue a ban on hand held cellular phone use while driving, and the trend appears to be on the rise. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has reported that the majority of information requests they receive are on cell phone use. According to NHTSA, the number of drivers using cell phones at any point in time during daylight hours has increased from 6% in 2002 up to 8% in 2004 (or 1.2 million drivers). While having a cell phone in your car is useful in emergency situations, it can also be a deadly distraction.

Human Factors experts have identified four types of driver distraction. Cell phones provide distraction in all four areas.

- **Visual:** Includes looking away from the road, such as when searching for your cell phone.
- **Biomechanical:** Includes manipulating a control, such as dialing your cell phone.
- **Auditory:** Includes unusual or unexpected noises, such as the ringing of your cell phone.
- **Cognitive:** Includes when your thoughts turn away from the task at hand, such as when you become engrossed in a phone conversation.

Due to the controversial nature of driver cell phone use, several research studies have been conducted to understand its effects on driving safety. According to a study done by Finnish traffic safety and research experts Poysti, Rajalin, and Summala¹, cell phone use affects drivers in the following ways:

- **Delays reaction time**
- **Impairs stopping decisions**
- **Declines lane control**
- **Lessens the amount of time spent examining instruments and mirrors**

Research has also pointed out specific groups at greater risk while using a cell phone and operating a vehicle—those who have little experience with cell phones and those who have little experience with driving. The first group tends to be of an older generation that did not grow up with this kind of technology, while the latter group tends to comprise younger drivers that have relatively little experience behind the wheel but have a high comfort level with cell phones.

Laws permitting only hands-free cell phone use are not the best solution. Research has shown no significant difference between hand held and hands-free cell phone use on driver performance. New laws, such as those being put into effect in Chicago, may be present the message that hands-free cell phone use is "safe" and those who have previously not chosen to talk and drive may now feel comfortable do so. This false perception of safety, and the fact that you don't have to hold the phone to your ear, may actually increase the length of phone conversations on the road, placing drivers at risk for longer periods of time. Although the technology is there and it is convenient, that does not mean we should utilize it when lives are at stake. The solution is simple; the best practice is NOT to talk on a cell phone and drive.



Multitasking Statement

The National Safety Council acknowledges that states have laws that prohibit distracted driving and that no one has a right to put others at risk.

The Council recognizes that electronic devices such as cell phones provide extraordinary benefits to public safety and productivity. However, a driver's first responsibility is the safe operation of the vehicle and that best practice is to not use electronic devices, including cell phones, while driving. When on the road, drivers shall concentrate on safe and defensive driving and not on making or receiving phone calls, delivery of faxes, using computers, navigation systems, or other distracting influences. When a driver decides that it is safe to use such a device while driving, it should be with the understanding that negligent drivers be held accountable when distracted driving results in the injury or death of others.

Furthermore, the National Safety Council supports restrictions that prohibit all non-emergency use of electronic devices including cell phones by teenage drivers during their graduated licensing period.

Sources:

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