Cell Phones and Driving



WHAT'S AT STAKE

We've all seen one – or been one. We're talking about that distracted driver, one hand on the steering wheel and the other on the phone, with the job of driving safely clearly far from his mind. Cell phone use has escalated considerably in the past decade. So has the number of phone-related traffic fatalities and the number of jurisdictions enacting laws that prohibit or restrict cell phone use. Many companies are following suit by introducing policies that prohibit or limit a worker's cell phone use while driving.

WHAT'S THE DANGER

Studies suggest driving while on a cell phone can be as dangerous as driving drunk. Not convinced? Try following drivers who are talking on the phone. Are they driving inconsistently, speeding up one minute and then slowing down the next? Do they change lanes unexpectedly or have difficulty staying in their own lane? Those are all telltale signs that a driver is distracted by a cell phone. A study conducted by the National Safety Council found cell phone users missed twice as many simulated traffic signals as drivers who weren't on the phone. This included drivers using a hands-free device, something researchers say is only slightly safer than using a hand-held phone.

Cell phones have not increased productivity to the extent that some might suggest. One company surveyed employees a year after introducing a cell phone ban and found 95 percent reported no lost productivity.

EXAMPLE
In June 2007, five teens were killed when their car swerved into oncoming traffic and collided with a truck. The investigation revealed that the driver's cell phone was being used to make calls and send text messages at the time of the crash.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

- Don't use a cell phone if you are a new driver or are getting accustomed to a new car. Master the most important skills first.
- Pull over to the side of the road to take or make calls, including calls to

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- Review your company’s cell phone policy, if one exists, and abide by it when driving or operating machinery and equipment including forklifts and backhoes.
- Familiarize yourself with any motor vehicle laws pertaining to cell phones, especially when traveling out of state or province.
- Limit phone use to when you are parked or ask a passenger to make calls for you.
- Use a hands-free headset and keep calls brief. Talking while driving is always distraction that is best avoided.
- Don’t take notes or look up phone numbers while driving. Ask the caller to leave details on your voicemail.
- Get to know your phone and its features so you know where the buttons are.
- Keep your phone within easy reach so you don’t have to take your eyes off the road.
- Don’t make or take calls during heavy traffic or severe weather.
- Never have stressful or emotional conversations while driving.
- Keep conversations brief. Let the person know you are driving and must hang up as soon as possible.

FINAL WORD

Cell phones have made our roads and highways both safer and more dangerous than ever before. Make a conscious effort to restrict, or eliminate, cell phone use while driving. It could mean the difference between life and death.