



SAFETY ALERT

Using Cell Phones While Driving

Take the Find-a-Cell-Phone-User challenge. Without looking at the driver, see if you can identify which cars have drivers that are talking on their cell phones. For most of us, it's not much of a challenge. Just look for cars that:

- Can't seem to maintain a constant speed.
- Weave from side to side in their lane.
- Fail to signal turns.
- Run through stop signs.
- Or, drive erratically.

As a general rule, these are the cars with drivers using their cell phone.

Is it dangerous to talk on the cell phone while driving?

According to accident statistics and research studies, the answer, is "Yes!" The two largest studies, one conducted in Canada (1997) and the other in Western Australia (2005), both indicate that cell phone users were four times more likely to be involved in crashes serious enough to cause injury than those who do not use cell phones while driving. Similar studies in the US show the same results.

But that's for hand-held phones, right? Not according to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. A recent study conducted in England indicated that drivers using cell phones were four times more likely to be involved in a crash and the crash rates were the same for those using hand-held devices and those using hands-free devices.

David Strayer, University of Utah, states that talking on a cell phone reduces our awareness of our surroundings and slows our reaction times because of "inattention blindness." Have you ever been talking on the cell phone while driving and suddenly realized that you don't remember the last few miles or don't know if you missed your turn? That's inattention blindness.

Although ninety-eight percent of all motorists consider themselves to be safe drivers, as many as four out of five drivers admit to driving while distracted, including cell phone use. As many as forty percent of all drivers between the age of eighteen and thirty admit to sending or reading text messages while driving, which has been shown to reduce reaction times by thirty-five percent.

To improve public safety, six states (California, Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, Utah, and Washington) and the District of Columbia currently prohibit the use of hand-held cellular telephones while driving. In addition, seventeen states prohibit teens and bus drivers from using cellular telephones while driving. To see a complete listing of state cell phone laws go to www.iihs.org/laws/cellphonelaws.aspx.

Should your company ban cell phone use while driving? The National Safety Council recommends that "employers assess whether to allow employees to use cell phones and other devices while driving, and if so, what sensible restrictions should be followed." The evidence seems clear – using a cell phone while driving a vehicle can seriously jeopardize your safety, the safety of your passengers, and the safety of those around you.