

It's common knowledge that the number one cause of work-related fatalities is vehicle accidents. Now, a new technology threatens to increase the accident potential for drivers. According to one research study, the use of a cellular phone while driving increases the risk of having an accident four-fold. Another study found that having a cellular phone in a vehicle increased the risk of being involved in an accident by 34 %. The U.S. Department of Transportation reports an increase in the number of complaints about drivers talking on their cellular phones while operating a vehicle. Critics of these studies argue that having a cellular telephone in the car can be an advantage when used to call emergency services. What do you think?

Reported Hazards Associated With Cellular Phones:

- Users are said to be distracted from defensive driving practices, and less responsive to highway traffic situations. When they do react, their response time is said to be longer.
- People on the phone are more likely to have intense conversations that involve problem-solving-which is more distracting than shooting the breeze with a passenger.
- Passengers in the car often alert drivers to dangerous situation, and stop talking at such times, in contrast to someone on the other end of the line who is unaware of the traffic situation.
- Cell phone users may be concentrating on dialing a number or handling the equipment and fail to notice a stop light, traffic sign, or a vehicle in front of them.
- Not only the driver on the phone, but other drivers on the roadway are at increased risk if a cell phone user is the ultimate cause of an accident.

Safety Reminders For Cell Phone Users:

- Ideally, the safest way to use a cell phone is with your vehicle stopped. If you must make a call from your vehicle, wait until you're stopped at a traffic light to dial, or better still, pull safely off the road, stop, then dial. Look for an easy exit to a rest stop, shopping center, normal curbside parking or other area away from hazardous traffic. Stopping on the shoulder of the road can put you in danger.
- Be sure your cell phone is easy to see and reach; out of the case and plugged in.
- Program frequently dialed numbers in a one or two button memory.
- Keep conversations short and sweet. Develop ways to get free of long-winded friends and associates while on the road. Don't use the cell phone for social visiting.
- Hang up in tricky traffic situations-without warning if necessary. Safe driving takes precedence over telephone etiquette. You can explain later-- because you'll still be alive!
- Resist dialing a number while on the move in heavy traffic whenever possible; wait until you are at a traffic light or stop sign. If you have to dial while driving, dial the first three numbers, check the road, then dial the rest.
- Keep even more distance between you and the car ahead of you than normally recommended.
- Consider using a "hands-free" speakerphone system, so you can keep your hands on the wheel and your eyes on the road-- and still keep talking. These speakerphones are available for many popular telephone models. Some states have proposed legislation that requires use of these devices.

All drivers are at risk of having a vehicle accident before, during or after work, and the use of a cell phone may increase this risk. Concentrate on the above reminders! Don't become a statistic!