

# CELL PHONES AND DRIVERS

## Introduction

### Focus

The Ontario government decided in the fall of 2008 that driving while distracted is a major threat to public safety. This *News in Review* story looks at the legislation in Ontario banning the use of hand-held cell phones, iPods, and portable GPS units while driving as well as the debate on the effectiveness of laws governing these activities.

He was the voice crying out from the wilderness. On six occasions between 1999 and 2008, Ontario Conservative MPP John O'Toole introduced a private member's bill calling for a ban on using cell phones while driving. Each effort that O'Toole made was all but ignored by those in power. In fact, Premier McGuinty routinely dismissed the Durham MPP's calls for a ban on cell-phone use while driving because his police contacts didn't consider the issue to be that pressing a concern.

### About Face

By the spring of 2008, the Ontario government dramatically shifted away from rejection of a cell-phone ban to consideration of sweeping "distracted driving" legislation in the province. Public concern over a number of fatal crashes in which cell-phone use was believed to have played a factor inspired the McGuinty Liberals to finally take action. The Liberals looked at legislation from other jurisdictions, namely Newfoundland and Labrador, Quebec, and Nova Scotia, before introducing their own law. Ontario's Minister of Transportation, Jim Bradley, claimed that existing laws in other provinces didn't go far enough. Ontario needed to target not only cell phones, but MP3 players, GPS units, portable video game equipment, and DVD players as well. The overall goal was to create a law that would deal with all of the distracting technological gadgets that currently exist and might soon come into existence. To ensure that the new law had teeth, Bradley announced that fines would be as high as \$500 for drivers who fiddled with technological gadgets while driving.

### Common Sense

Ontario legislators joined governments in Newfoundland, Quebec, and Nova Scotia in a plea for common sense. Driving requires concentration, and drivers need to avoid distractions. However, driving behaviour in all of these provinces proved that common sense was not prevailing. Newfoundland reported a spike in traffic fatalities in 2000 due to driver distraction and cell-phone use. They also reported a 22 per cent drop in injuries and fatalities after legislation banning cell-phone use while driving was introduced in 2003. Quebec claimed that cell-phone use played a role in 24 fatal car crashes between 2000 and 2006. In Ontario, a coroner's inquest looking into the death of Richard Schewe and his daughter Mikaela recommended a complete cell-phone ban (including hands-free phones). Schewe was talking on his cell phone when he drove his truck into a speeding train. Both he and his daughter were killed instantly.

### Distracted Driving

According to the Canadian Automobile Association ([www.caa.ca](http://www.caa.ca)), 80 per cent of crashes are caused by distracted drivers. Meanwhile, 37 per cent of Canadians admit to using their cell phones while driving. With this level of distracted-driving behaviour, provincial governments have felt compelled to take action. Current research supports their calls for a ban on using cell phones while driving. Study after study in Canada, the United States, and Europe demonstrates that dialing or talking on a cell phone while driving is risky business. Cell-phone conversations are so distracting to drivers that they are more likely to run red lights, stop checking their mirrors,

**Quote**

"Having narrowly avoided a 12-car pile-up while jotting off a text message in downtown traffic recently (I'm not proud of it. I'm just saying . . . ), I am (barely) living testament to the fact we need saving from our tech-obsessed selves." — Robert Cribb, technology expert (*Toronto Star*, November 8, 2008)

and get into collisions. Some liken driving while on a cell phone to driving drunk. The bottom line: the mere act of talking on the phone exponentially increases the chances of drivers getting into a crash. Perhaps Dalhousie researcher Raymond Klein put it best when he said, "We actually drive with our minds . . . and if our minds are busy, then we might make mistakes [while] driving" (CBC News, October 17, 2008).

**No worries for the cell-phone industry**

The cell-phone industry put up a mild fight when Ontario joined the other three provinces in declaring a cell-phone ban. They claimed that distractions abound when people drive, and it is impossible to draw a line that bans these distractions. Are provincial governments prepared to outlaw drinking a cup of coffee when driving? Are governments prepared to ban passengers from vehicles? Opponents of a cell-phone ban while driving make the point that cell phones are not the problem; distractions while driving are the problem. Has the cell-phone industry become the scapegoat in society's quest to get people to pay attention while driving? Scapegoat or not, the cell-phone industry isn't worried. Sales are booming, with 60 per cent of North Americans owning a cell phone. Meanwhile, the companies continue to cram more features into the phones; things like MP3 players and cameras are being accompanied by GPS programs and Internet browsers. Governments can ban cell-phone use while driving but they aren't going to stop people from buying and using cell phones.

**Not even car makers are worried**

The manufacturers of cars aren't too concerned about cell-phone bans either. They are pretty confident that any ban will be limited to hand-held units, so they are creating state-of-the-art hands-free technologies. Ford partnered with Microsoft to develop Sync, an infotainment/communication system outfitted in their vehicles. Chrysler has developed a system called MyGIG. Both of these systems allow people to access GPS programs and activate phones by voice commands. Essentially, car makers are putting more distractions into cars while making them as user-friendly as possible. Experts estimate that in-car technologies now amount to a \$10-billion-a-year industry. One commentator noted that it costs considerably more to get anti-lock breaks put on your Ford Focus SE (\$805) than it does to get Sync installed (\$495) (*Toronto Star*, March 15, 2008).

**Conclusion**

While the Ontario government is seeking gadget control with its distracted-driving legislation, it is uncertain whether the law will be able to withstand the wave of technology that is destined to appear in the not-too-distant future. It is one thing to go after people holding a phone up to their ears. It is quite another to control the myriad distractions—both old and new—that are bound to take drivers' minds off their primary responsibility while behind the wheel: driving safely. You have to wonder what John O'Toole thinks of all this.

## Questions

1. Who is John O'Toole? What did he try to get the Ontario government to do between 1999 and 2008?
2. Why did Ontario Premier McGuinty change his mind regarding cell-phone use while driving?
3. Identify three points that support the fact that using your cell phone while driving is dangerous.
4. Why isn't the cell-phone industry worried about laws banning hand-held cell phones while driving?
5. What technologies have automakers introduced into their vehicles?
6. Do you think people will stop using their cell phones while driving?
7. In your experience, is it dangerous to use a cell phone while driving? Explain fully.
8. Will you, your friends, or family members comply readily if your province or territory enacts legislation similar to that planned for Ontario? Explain.

# CELL PHONES AND DRIVERS

## Video Review

### Did you know . . .

According to a 1999 study, 24 per cent of drivers in crashes had used a cell phone in the 10 minutes preceding the crash.

### Quote

"iPod, Blackberry, cellphone, you name it. To tell you the truth, I have been in situations when I have been looking down and text-messaging on my Blackberry and driving with my knees."

— Peter Machalek, sales representative (*Toronto Star*, October 26, 2008)

Watch the video and answer the questions.

1. What percentage of drivers admit to using their cell phones while driving?

\_\_\_\_\_ %

2. Describe the crash that took the lives of Richard Schewe and his daughter Mikaela.

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\_\_\_\_\_

3. What does the research of Donald Redelmeier tell us about cell-phone use and driving?

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4. How has the cell-phone industry responded to Redelmeier's research?

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5. Why did Michael Joliffe decide to start turning his cell phone off before getting into his car?

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6. What did Yoko Ishigami and Raymond Klein discover when they looked into hands-free cell-phone use?

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7. How did Michael Joliffe's company AMEC take the lead when it comes to talking on a cell phone while driving?

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8. What happened to Newfoundland and Labrador Premier Danny Williams when a motorist saw him talking on his cell phone?

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9. Describe your personal observations concerning drivers using cell phones.

# CELLPHONES AND DRIVERS

## **The Problem: Distracted Driving**

Laws banning hand-held cell phones while driving are part of an overall effort to reduce the risk to public safety caused by distracted driving. If you talk to the experts they'll tell you: efforts must be made to reduce the number of distractions motorists face. In other words, cell phones aren't the problem; the distraction caused by the cell-phone conversation is the problem. The United States National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA – [www.nhtsa.dot.gov](http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov)) came up with a list of behaviours and circumstances that distract drivers from keeping an eye on the road. They even came up with the odds of getting into a crash based on each item. The higher the number in the list below, the more likely a collision. This list is based on odds-ratio calculations that compare the likelihood of an event happening with the likelihood of an event not occurring.

According to the NHTSA, you are putting yourself and others at risk if you take part in any of the following activities while driving.

- Reaching for a moving object – 8.8
- Paying attention to an insect inside your vehicle – 6.4
- Looking at external objects – 3.7
- Reading – 3.4
- Applying make-up – 3.1
- Dialing a cell phone – 2.8
- Inserting or retrieving a CD – 2.3
- Eating – 1.6
- Reaching for a non-moving object – 1.4
- Talking or listening on a cell phone – 1.3
- Drinking from an open container – 1.0
- Tending to personal hygiene – 0.7
- Adjusting your radio - 0.6
- Having a passenger in the front seat – 0.5

- Having a passenger in the back seat – 0.4
- Combing your hair – 0.4
- Having a child in the back seat – 0.3

Source: United States National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

### **Why pick on cell phones?**

The question is: why target cell phones when there are clearly other distractions that are more risky than talking on your cell? The answer to this question comes from over a decade of research:

- A 1997 University of Toronto study concluded that drivers are four times more likely to get into a crash when they are chatting on their cell phones.
- A 2006 University of Utah study concluded that talking on a cell phone (either hand-held or hands-free) while driving is just like driving drunk.
- A 2007 University of Maryland study claimed that cell-phone users are more likely to engage in high-risk behaviours like running a red light than those not using a cell phone.
- A Dalhousie University study found that people talking on hands-free devices while driving tend to fail to monitor their speed or mirrors.

Cell-phone use while driving poses a unique threat to public safety. While all distractions pose a risk, the cell phone is one risk that lawmakers think they can control. It is pretty easy for a police officer to pull over someone with a phone plastered to their ear. It is a behaviour that governments around the world feel should be limited to places other than behind a steering wheel.

### **What do teens think?**

Did you know that drivers between the ages of 16 and 19 are four times more likely to die in a car crash than adult drivers? Did you know that car crashes are the leading cause of death and serious injury in young people in North America? If distractions are a problem for adult drivers, they are even more of a problem for younger, less-experienced drivers. Even young drivers see that limiting distractions is essential to driving and arriving safely. According to a survey published in the journal *Pediatrics*, 25 per cent of young people consider talking on a cell phone while driving to be dangerous, and 79 per cent said that text messaging while driving is very dangerous (*The Globe and Mail*, March 6 and May 29, 2008). But will

young drivers actually avoid talking on their cell phones while driving—even if a law threatens them with fines and demerit points? If young drivers are anything like their adult counterparts, they'll reach for the phone if it rings. An Insurance Bureau of Canada survey found that 90 per cent of drivers admitted that distraction was a problem, but 60 per cent said they would continue to talk on their phones while driving despite the risks (“Distracted to death,” *The [Kitchener-Waterloo] Record*, September 10, 2008). Time will tell if new provincial laws will deter people from using their cell phones while driving. Hopefully young drivers, with a wealth of knowledge and a world ahead of them, will heed the warnings and put their cell phones away when they're behind the wheel.

### **Analysis**

1. How serious is the problem of distracted driving?
2. Which item on the list do you think is the most dangerous? Why?
3. Have you ever been in a car where you felt that driver distraction put you at risk? Describe what happened.
4. Briefly summarize the conclusions found in the research listed above.
5. What do you think? Is talking on your cell phone while driving dangerous? What about text messaging? Will the law keep people from using their cell phones while they are behind the wheel?

# CELL PHONES AND DRIVERS

## **VI** Governments React: The Global Experience

The effort to ban hand-held cell phones while driving has become an international story. Take a look at the chart below and complete the activity that follows.

### Cell-phone Bans Around the World (as of 2008)

Countries that ban cell-phone use while driving*	Countries considering bans on cell-phone use while driving
Australia, Austria, Bahrain, Belgium, Brazil, Chile, China, Czech Republic, Denmark, Egypt, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hong Kong (China), India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kenya, Malaysia, Netherlands, Norway, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Singapore, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Switzerland, Taiwan, Thailand, Turkey, United Kingdom, Zimbabwe	Botswana New Zealand
	Countries that ban cell-phone use while driving in some provinces/states
	Canada (4 provinces) Mexico Pakistan The United States (29 states)**
	Countries not considering a ban on cell-phone use while driving
	Sweden

Source: [www.cellular-news.com](http://www.cellular-news.com)

\*Note: most countries ban the use of hand-held cell phones while driving and allow the use of hands-free cell phones.

\*\*Of the 29 states, six have comprehensive bans on hand-held cell phones. The other 23 states have partial bans that affect drivers in specific circumstances (e.g., new drivers, school-bus drivers).

### Activity

Visit [www.cellular-news.com](http://www.cellular-news.com) and get the details on when and why any five countries in the list above decided to ban cell phones while driving. Are the restrictions similar among the nations you selected?

# CELL PHONES AND DRIVERS

## Governments React: The Canadian Experience

### Did you know . . .

Faulty GPS instructions are a source of more and more collisions. Britain's, *Mirror* newspaper reported that 300 000 British motorists have crashed or nearly crashed as a result of faulty GPS instructions (*Toronto Star*, October 6, 2008).

### Newfoundland and Labrador

- The first province to pass laws concerning hand-held cell phones
- Laws banning the use of hand-held cell phones were introduced in 2002 and implemented in 2003
- Fines range from \$45 to \$180 and four demerit points
- The government says injuries and fatalities related to cell-phone use while driving dropped 22 per cent in the three years since the cell-phone ban came into effect.

### Quebec

- Passed legislation in 2007 banning cell-phone use while driving
- The government found evidence linking 24 driving fatalities between 2000 and 2006 to cell-phone use.
- Fines range from \$80 to \$100 and three demerit points

### Nova Scotia

- Introduced legislation in early 2008 that banned talking on a hand-held cell phones and text messaging
- Fines range from \$50 to \$200

### Ontario

- Introduced distracted-driving legislation in the fall of 2008

### Activity

Use the information above to write a 250- to 500-word newspaper report on the national effort to ban the use of hand-held cell phones while driving.

- The legislation calls for a ban on technologies that distract drivers; these technologies include hand-held cell phones, portable GPS units, portable gaming equipment, and DVD players visible to the driver.
- Fines reach as high as \$500.

### The Other Provinces

- Manitoba is expected to announce a hand-held cell-phone ban before the end of 2008.
- Prince Edward Island is considering banning the use of hand-held cell phones while driving.
- New Brunswick is studying the effectiveness of hand-held cell-phone bans in other jurisdictions.
- According to an Angus Reid poll, 79 per cent of people in British Columbia support a cell-phone ban while driving (*The Vancouver Sun*, November 30, 2008); the provincial government is considering introducing legislation to ban cell-phone use while driving.
- Alberta opposes a ban on hand-held cell phones while driving .

Note: All provinces with bans on hand-held cell-phone use while driving make exceptions for 911 calls.

# CELL PHONES AND DRIVERS

## *Safe Driving – It's Your Call*

The Canada Safety Council (CSC- [www.safety-council.org](http://www.safety-council.org)) endorses the use of cell phones in cars for emergency reasons. In fact, somewhere in the neighbourhood of six million 911 calls are made from cell phones each year.

However, with over 15 million cell phones in use across Canada, the CSC acknowledges that, despite new laws and warnings, people are going to use their cell phones in their cars. While they don't endorse this behaviour, the CSC believes that if people are going to use their cell phones in their vehicles, they should follow a few basic safety tips:

- **Keep Your Hands on the Wheel.** If you have to send or receive a call while driving, make sure you can do it as hands-free as possible; this means having your phone voice-activated to respond to your verbal commands.
- **Keep Your Eyes on the Road.** If you need to send or receive a call, make sure you can do it without taking your eyes off the road.
- **Practise Off-Road.** If you need to send or receive a call while driving, practise using your phone off-road. Make sure you can press the appropriate buttons without looking at the phone.
- **Use a Hands-Free Model.** Purchase devices or enable functions that allow you to use your phone hands-free. In Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Quebec, and Ontario motorists have to use hands-free technologies if they choose to use their phones in the car. When available, the CSC recommends attaching the microphone to the visor just above your line of vision, so you can keep your eyes on the road. You can then talk on the phone as if you were talking to a passenger.
- **Stay in Your Lane.** Cellphones don't cause crashes, distracted drivers do. Don't get so wrapped up in a conversation that you drift into the other lane. Pull into the right-hand lane while talking, so you only have to worry about traffic on your left.
- **Use Speed Dialing.** Program frequently called numbers and local emergency numbers into the speed-dial feature of your phone for easy dialing. When available, use auto answer or voice-activated dialing.
- **Never Dial While Driving.** If you must dial manually, do so only when stopped. Pull off the road, or better yet, have a passenger dial for you.
- **Take a Message.** Let your voice-mail pick up your calls in tricky driving situations like heavy traffic or bad weather. It's easy to retrieve your messages later on.
- **Know When to Stop Talking.** Keep conversations brief so you can concentrate on your driving. If a long discussion is required, if the topic is stressful or emotional, or if driving becomes hazardous, end your call and continue when you're not in traffic.
- **Keep the Phone in a Holder.** Make sure your phone is secured in some kind of holder. That way you won't feel the need to search for it when you are driving.
- **Don't Take Notes While Driving.** If you need to take something down, use a tape recorder or pull off the road. If you have a memo function on your phone, use it to record numbers while you are talking.
- **Don't Text Message While Driving.** If dialing is risky behaviour while

driving, you have to know that text messaging is extremely dangerous. Pull over to send and receive text messages.

- Be a Wireless Samaritan. Use your cell phone to report crimes, life-threatening emergencies, collisions, or drunk drivers.
- Drive Defensively. Be prepared for the

unsafe actions of other motorists or for poor driving conditions. Do your part by staying off your cell phone unless absolutely necessary.

Source: Adapted with permission from the Canadian Safety Council ([www.safety-council.org/info/traffic/cellular.html](http://www.safety-council.org/info/traffic/cellular.html) )

### **Activity**

1. Rank the safety tips, from your personal point of view, with the most important safety tip coming first and the least important coming last. Write the ranking number to the left of each item on the page, then circle three that you would personally find difficult to do. Be prepared to explain your selections.
2. Re-write your top five safety tips in five brief, easy-to-understand sentences.

### **Extension Activity**

Use the five sentences from above to make a safety poster that helps to educate people about the dangers of distracted driving.

# CELL PHONES AND DRIVERS

## *Banning Portable Technology in Schools*

While governments across Canada continue to target cell-phone use while driving, school boards are banning just about every electronic gadget that might distract students from their schoolwork. In the winter of 2007, the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board in Ontario voted to ban the use of personal electronic devices (PED) in their schools. The policy covered cell phones, MP3 players, and portable gaming equipment. The board was responding to staff concerns that PEDs were becoming a major headache. Teachers reported students were routinely answering cell phones in class, sending and receiving text messages, listening to music on their MP3 players, and playing the latest games on their portable game players. They also pointed out that some students were using PEDs to cheat on tests and assignments by sharing and copying answers electronically. The teachers were frustrated, and the board responded with a complete ban on PEDs.

Almost immediately, teachers scurried to their classrooms and posted signs reading “No PEDs!” School administrators vowed to confiscate the devices if they saw them out in the

open. The PED ban was greeted with surprise by some students and anger by others. One high school wound up suspending 11 students after a Facebook page vilifying the principal for the new policy was deemed to be a case of cyber-bullying. For a time, the PEDs flew below the radar, but emerging portable technologies have an addictive quality and, within a few months, students were back to dialing, texting, and listening to music around the school.

Now the PED is so prevalent that teachers and administrators do not know what to do next. Almost every student has some kind of PED—with cell phones and MP3 players being a technological staple for many in the school community. In a sense, schools in Dufferin-Peel are flooded with PEDs, so much so that enforcement of the board’s 2007 policy seems almost impossible. Nonetheless, efforts to maintain the PED ban continue. When PEDs are visible, teachers simply ask students to put them away. If the student refuses, administrators are called in to deal with the problem. Essentially, technologies that did not exist 20 years ago are becoming the classroom management flashpoint of the new era.

### Questions

1. What are the rules surrounding PEDs at your school?
2. Do students follow the rules? Do teachers enforce the rules?
3. What is the rationale behind rules surrounding PEDS? In other words, why were these rules put in place?
4. Describe any PEDs that you have. Do you use them in school?
5. In your opinion, are rules banning PEDs necessary? Are they enforceable?

# CELL PHONES AND DRIVERS

## **Activity: Write an Opinion**

### **Update**

As this story was being prepared, Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty mused publicly about further restrictions on teenage drivers in Ontario. He promised to invite teenagers to share their thoughts with his government.

Work through the following exercise and then write a paper that clearly states your opinion regarding cell-phone use while driving or distracted driving in general.

### **Your Task**

Work with a partner on the first two questions, below.

1. Visit the Canadian Automobile Association's Web site at [www.caa.ca](http://www.caa.ca) and type in "distracted-driving laws in Canada" in the search box. Follow the link and read about your province or territory. Make point-form notes on the laws in your area. In your view, are the laws tough enough in your province or territory?
2. Read about the laws in other provinces and territories. Write one sentence that describes the laws in each one. In your opinion which province or territory has the best distracted-driving laws in Canada?

Team up with another pair of classmates for the next question.

3. In your opinion, are cell phones being unfairly targeted by provincial and territorial governments? Use the material in "The Problem: Distracted Driving" on page 24 of this *News in Review* story and your point-form notes from above to support your position.

As a class, discuss these questions.

4. Do you think existing laws will help to eliminate distracted driving?
5. Which driving behaviours do you think are the most dangerous?
6. What emerging technologies will be the next to distract drivers?
7. Will people stop talking on their hand-held cell phones while driving? Should there be laws stopping them from talking on their hand-held cell phones? Should there be laws banning hands-free phone conversations while driving as well?
8. How likely are you to comply with distracted driving legislation? Explain.

### **Follow-up**

Put all of the information you have gathered from the exercise above together and write a 250- to 400-word opinion paper that clearly states where you stand on the issue. You can either talk about distracted driving in general or you can focus on cell phones.

OR

Present a three-minute mini-speech outlining your views on the issue.