

# Mobile phone use and road safety



Evidence indicates that using a mobile phone while driving is a distraction and has an adverse effect on driver performance. When using a mobile phone while driving, the risk of being involved in a crash is four times greater than normal. Research shows that hands-free mobile phone use while driving is just as dangerous as hand-held mobile phone use ([www.ors.wa.gov.au](http://www.ors.wa.gov.au)).

## The current problem

With the increase in use of technology, driver distraction poses a significant threat to road safety. A driver distraction is anything that takes your concentration away from driving. It has been estimated that distraction contributed to 32% of all road crash deaths and serious injuries in WA between 2005 and 2007<sup>1</sup>.

Mobile phone use is one of the most common causes of distraction to drivers. Evidence<sup>2</sup> shows that using a phone while driving:

- increases a driver's mental workload,
- slows reaction times,
- impairs judgment,
- reduces ability to maintain speed and throttle control and
- reduces awareness of surroundings.

As a result of this, the chances of a crash are increased by up to four times when using a mobile phone while driving.

## What the law says

The law in WA regarding mobile phone use while driving states that drivers can only use a mobile phone to make or receive a call if:

- it is secured in a mounting affixed to the vehicle, or
- if not secured, can be operated without touching it using a hands-free device.

It is an offence to create, send or look at a text message, video message, email or similar communication while driving. The GPS function of a mobile phone may be used by a driver only if the phone is secured in a mounting and the driver does not touch the phone at any time ([www.ors.wa.gov.au](http://www.ors.wa.gov.au)).

**While this is the law, using a phone in any manner while driving, can significantly reduce driving ability and increase the risk of a crash.**

## Community attitudes

A survey of the WA public in 2010 indicated that:

- 96% believe that sending or receiving text messages while driving is distracting and
- 85% believe that making or receiving a call is distracting<sup>3</sup>.

Despite this

- 54% admitted to reading text messages,
- 46% answered calls,
- 36% admitted to making phone calls and
- 35% to sending texts<sup>3</sup>.

### Did you know?

As of the 2014 Easter long weekend, double demerits includes illegal use of a mobile phone while driving.

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## What we know

Mobile phone use while driving can distract drivers in several ways:

- **Physical distraction** - using hands to answer or dial a number.
- **Visual distraction** - taking eyes off the road to use mobile phone.
- **Auditory distraction** - driver startled by ringing or conversation that is taking place.
- **Cognitive distraction** - diverting attention from driving to the conversation itself.

### Hands-free versus hand held phone use

Evidence suggests that using a hands-free phone is not a safe alternative to hand-held phone use. Research<sup>2</sup> says that hands-free phones can reduce the physical distraction; however, the actual task of talking and listening on the phone affects the cognitive ability of the driver and distracts them from driving safely.

### Phone use versus passenger conversation

Passengers can see what is happening on the road and can allow for pauses in conversation to help the driver concentrate fully if a dangerous driving situation occurs. A person on a phone however, is not aware of potential hazards and will continue to converse, potentially distracting the driver at critical moments<sup>2</sup>.

### Text messages

Research has found that sending text messages is far more distracting than simply talking on the phone. When text messaging, drivers can spend up to 400% more time with their eyes off the road than when they are not text messaging<sup>4</sup>.

### Did you know?

Research<sup>5</sup> shows that driver reaction times are 50% slower when using a mobile phone while driving, but only 30% slower when the driver has a blood alcohol concentration of 0.08.

## What you can do?

### Individuals:

- Turn off your mobile phone when driving (even if it is a hands-free mobile phone).
- Check a map or your GPS before setting off so you know directions to your destination.

### Local Governments:

- Develop a safe driving policy for Council employees, which includes a 'keys in, phone off' component.
- Work with your local RoadWise Committee and/or Road Safety Advisor and media outlets to encourage local residents to turn off their phones while driving.

### Organisations:

- Develop an organisational safe driving policy, which includes a 'keys in, phone off' element.
- Educate your employees on the dangers of using a mobile phone while driving.

### References:

1. Road Safety Council 2009, *Towards Zero Road Safety Strategy*, page 16, Perth Western Australia.
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3. Synovate, *Road Safety in WA—Monitoring the Views of the Community*, April to June 2010, 2010.
4. Hosking, S, Young, K & Regan, M, 2007, *The effects of text messaging on young novice driver performance*, Monash University Accident Research Centre, Victoria.
5. Burns, P, Parkes, A, Burton, S, Smith, R, & Burch, D, 2002, *How dangerous is driving with a mobile phone? Benchmarking the impairment to alcohol*, TRL Report TRL547, TRL Limited, Berkshire, United Kingdom.

TOWARDS ZERO



getting there together

E roadwise@walga.asn.au  
W www.roadwise.asn.au