



Environmental Health & Safety

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Cell Phones & Driving - Don't Mix Well

There is a direct relationship between motor vehicle incidents and driver use of cellular telephones. This was revealed in a study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*. The authors, Donald A. Redelmeier, M.D. and Robert J. Tibshirani, Ph.D., determined the following conclusions:

- ✓ Drivers making a cellular phone call were at four times the collision risk when not making such a call. *This is comparable to when a driver's blood alcohol level is at the legal limit.*
- ✓ Motorists in the age brackets 25-39 and 40-54 were at higher risk than those under 25 or over 55 years of age.
- ✓ Risks were similar at different times of the day and of the week.
- ✓ Those drivers with more years of driving experience (10-19 and 20-29 years behind the wheel) actually had a higher collision rate than those with less overall driving experience, 0-9 years, or those with more than 30 years worth of experience.
- ✓ Surprisingly, there apparently is no safety advantage when hands free phones are used versus the traditional hand held units.

The authors also noted that the data did not indicate if the drivers in this study were legally at fault in these collisions, or if their decreased ability to avoid the impending collision was the primary factor.

What can you do to ensure a safer ride if you drive and use a cellular phone? Use the same attitude when utilizing overall defensive driving skills - *concentrate on your personal driving skills*

and those around you, not your phone conversation.

First, it is difficult to apply safe driving principles while talking on a car phone. For example, a vehicle going 55 mph travels the length of a football field in about 3.7 seconds. That's about 80 feet per second, so even a momentary lapse of attention during a call can be critical. Again, focusing your attention and concentration on your driving should be the top priority.

Second, consider a vehicle phone safety program, preferably one endorsed by the Cellular Telephone Industry Association, which emphasizes responsible and defensive driving principles for cellular phone users, e.g., how to find safe use areas to make calls, or placing, receiving and ending calls.

While cell phones have increased productivity for those frequently on the road and given peace of mind to over 30 million North Americans, this study should be a signal to vehicle cell phone users. *Good driving habits can decline and bad driving habits, sooner or later, will affect fellow drivers on the road.* Time will tell if any legislation similar to that enacted in Australia, Brazil, and Israel prohibiting the use of a cellular phone while driving, will impact American motorists.

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