

Cell phone safety—driving home the importance

These days, it's hard to find someone who does not have a cell phone. Cell phones can be invaluable for those business professionals who spend a lot of time out of the office, or for anyone who wants the added peace of mind of knowing they can call for help in an emergency.

Are there laws limiting the use of cell phones while driving?

Connecticut prohibits the use of cell phones while operating a motor vehicle on a public highway. Effective Oct. 1, 2013, Connecticut also prohibits the use of cell phones while operating a commercial motor vehicle on a public highway. Hands-free cell phones are permitted, except for individuals holding a learners permit under 18 years of age.

Also, school bus drivers are prohibited from using a cell phone, including with hands-free accessories or mobile electronic devices, while operating a school bus in emergency situations. A school bus driver in an emergency situation faces the same penalties as other drivers.

Are there laws limiting the use of cell phones or mobile electronic devices for messaging or transferring electronic data while driving?

Connecticut prohibits the use of cell phones or mobile electronic devices used to transmit messages or transfer data while driving for vehicles on Oct. 1, 2013. It is prohibited to use commercial motor vehicles while using cell phones or mobile electronic devices used to transmit text messages.

Mobile electronic devices means any hand-held or portable electronic equipment used for personal or business communication by two or more persons, including a text messaging device, a paging device, a PDA, a laptop computer, equipment that is capable of playing a video game or digital graphics or equipment on which digital graphics are taken or transmitted.

What penalties could violators face?

Currently, violators charged for using a cell phone while operating a motor vehicle can face a fine of up to \$150 for the first violation, \$300 for a second violation and \$500 for a third or subsequent violation and will appear on the motor vehicle record of the person in violation.

Familiarize yourself with your phone

Familiarize yourself with the literature that comes with your phone. Understand how to use its features—including speed dial, redial, and hands-free options.

Be aware of your surroundings and road conditions

If you find yourself in hazardous driving conditions—whether traffic- or weather-related—let your voice-mail system pick up the call. A few minutes of paying attention and pulling over in a safe location, could make a huge difference in your safety and the safety of those around you.

Stay calm on the phone and on the road

Don't use driving time to engage in stressful or emotional conversations. They can distract you from driving safely and sensibly, even if you are using a hands-free phone.

Cell phones can be an invaluable business tool or your lifeline in a real emergency. But, remember, when you're behind the wheel, your most important responsibility is safe driving.

