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HB 257  
1/2010

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration policy on cellular phone use while driving is that it is the primary responsibility of the driver is to operate a motor vehicle safely. The task of driving requires full attention and focus. Cell phone use can distract drivers from this task, risking harm to themselves and others. Therefore, the safest course of action is to refrain from using a cell phone while driving.

NHTSA encourages states to pass laws which ban the use of cell phones. Distracted driving related crashes have increased in the last 10 years.

Ten years ago only 15% of the reported traffic crashes were attributed to driver inattention. NHTSA estimates that driver distraction from all sources contributes to 25 % of all traffic crashes.

A ban on hand-held devices has been enacted in 8 states:

1. California
2. Connecticut
3. District of Columbia
4. New Jersey
5. New York
6. Oregon
7. Washington
8. Virgin Islands

**In those states with established handheld laws, distracted driving-related fatalities have declined between 24 % (New York) and 65% (Connecticut). (Source: Insurance Institute for Highway Safety)**

### **NHTSA Recognized Research:**

Using a cell phone use while driving, whether it's hand-held or hands-free, delays a driver's reactions as much as having a blood alcohol concentration at the legal limit of .08 percent. (Source: University of Utah)

Driving while using a cell phone reduce the amount of brain activity associated with driving by 37 percent. (Source: Carnegie Mellon)

80 percent of all crashes and 65 percent of near crashes involve some type of distraction. (Source: Virginia Tech 100-car study for NHTSA)

The Virginia Tech study also showed that talking on a cell phone allowed drivers to keep their eyes on the road and did not carry nearly the same increased safety risk as texting. The research showed that most of the danger involved finding the phone, putting on the headset (if used) and dialing the number.

In a NHTSA test track study, the results showed that manual dialing was about as distracting as grooming/eating, but less distracting than reading or changing CDs. It is also important to keep in mind that some activities are carried out more frequently and for longer periods of time and may result in greater risk.

Nearly 6,000 people died in 2008 in crashes involving a distracted or inattentive driver, and more than half a million were injured. (NHTSA)

Drivers who use hand-held devices are four times as likely to get into crashes serious enough to injure themselves. (Source: Insurance Institute for Highway Safety)

### **Alaska Distracted Driving Statistics:**

Driver inattention is cited in 28% of all traffic-related crashes.

Driver distraction plays a factor in an average of 10-12 crashes daily.

From 2002-2007 there were 189 reported traffic crashes involving cell phone use.

From 2002-2007, of the 189 reported traffic crashes, 127 resulted in minor injuries, 19 in major injuries and 0 fatalities.

From 2002-2007 of the 189 reported traffic crashes, there were 200 minor injuries and 20 major injuries in these traffic crashes.

### **National Distracted Driving Statistics:**

In 2008, there were a total of 34,017 fatal crashes in which 37,261 individuals were killed.

In 2008, 5,870 people were killed in crashes involving driver distraction (16% of total fatalities).

The proportion of drivers reportedly distracted at the time of the fatal crashes has increased from 8 percent in 2004 to 11 percent in 2008.

An estimated 21 percent of 1,630,000 injury crashes were reported to have involved distracted driving.

Number of Motor Vehicle Crashes Involving Cell phone Use, Alaska 2002-2007

	Property Damage Only	Minor Injury	Major Injury	Fatal	TOTAL
2002	38	16	5	0	59
2003	34	24	1	0	59
2004	33	22	6	0	61
2005	38	21	3	0	62
2006	24	21	3	0	48
2007	22	23	1	0	46
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>189</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>335</b>

Source: State of Alaska, DOT&PF, Highway Analysis System (HAS)

Number of Injuries in Motor Vehicle Crashes Involving Cell Phone Use, Alaska 2002-2007

	No Injuries	Minor Injury	Major Injury	Fatalities	TOTAL
2002	132	30	6	0	168
2003	140	39	1	0	180
2004	121	32	6	0	159
2005	109	32	3	0	144
2006	94	38	3	0	135
2007	79	29	1	0	109
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>675</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>895</b>

Source: State of Alaska, DOT&PF, Highway Analysis System (HAS)

Number of Motor Vehicle Crashes Involving Cell Phone Use, By Age of Driver Using Cell Phone, Alaska 2002-2007

Age of Driver using Cell Phone	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	TOTAL Crashes
under 10							0
10-15			1				1
16-20	17	20	22	24	16	18	117
21-25	8	9	8	6	12	9	52
26-30	7	5	6	8	5	5	36
31-35	9	7	6	6	2	1	31
36-40	7	3	6	3	7	3	29
41-45	4	6	3	6	4	3	26
46-50	3	7	6	5	1	2	24
51-55		1	1	1		2	5
56-60	1		2	1		1	5
61-65		1		1		0	2
66-70	1			1		1	3
71-75	1						1
76-80							0
81+					1		1
Unknown	1					1	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>335</b>

Source: State of Alaska, DOT&PF, Highway Analysis System (HAS)

## **Our view: Distracted**

Ban on cell phone use while driving is common sense


Published: January 12th, 2010 07:16 PM

Last Modified: January 12th, 2010 07:17 PM

Multitasking is overrated. Sometimes it's dangerous. That's the case with talking on a cell phone while driving.

And that's why Rep. Mike Doogan has pre-filed a bill to ban jabbering on a cell phone while driving in Alaska. His bill would make exception for emergencies.

Doogan's blanket ban is better than a bill left over from last year that bans the practice for drivers younger than 18. Evidence is clear that young drivers are on average worse at driving than adult drivers. But everyone's driving gets worse when they use a cell phone on the road.



Cell phone distraction is insidious. University of Utah researchers found that driving while using a cell phone was as bad as driving drunk. They also found that most drivers felt using a cell made no difference in their driving. That misperception makes the practice even more dangerous.

Alaska should make it illegal.

Rep. Jay Ramras said Doogan's bill won't get out of his committee unless it makes the offense secondary. In other words, a driver won't get cited for cell phone use unless he's pulled over for something else first. That defeats the purpose of the bill, which is to get drivers off their cell phones and paying attention to the one job they need to do while behind the wheel -- driving. Give police and troopers discretion to warn first and ticket later. But for the bill to matter, driving while distracted by cell should be a primary offense.

Rep. Ramras said police don't need another reason to pull people over. The reason -- and danger -- is already with us. We just need to give our police the authority to deal with it.

**BOTTOM LINE:** Cell phone use while driving is dangerous and unnecessary. Alaska should ban it.

**adn.com**

Anchorage Daily News

**Letters to the editor (10/22/09)**

Published: October 21st, 2009 07:11 PM

Last Modified: October 21st, 2009 07:12 PM

**Get cell-phone drivers off road**

Driving with others who aren't attentive to their bad driving habits is bad enough. Now you throw in a cell phone and they are totally oblivious to the fact that they are even on the road in control of a 3,000-pound vehicle. It's time we stop this nonsense before winter starts. The bases have the right idea by banning all use of cell phones while driving -- why not the public roads? I don't know about you, but I have enough bills and don't want to add my insurance deductible to the debt -- much less a possibility of being injured or loss of my vehicle for weeks at a time while it's being repaired.

Maybe more pulloffs for those who insist on having to talk on the phone -- anything!

Change the law now before more people get hurt. Other states have wised up -- what are we waiting for?

-- *John Reece*

*Anchorage*

January 25, 2010

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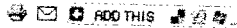

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Talk of the Tundra

## Safe driving not a partisan issue

John Aronno

Jan 23, 2010



It's dark. I'm in a hurry. Only 15 minutes separate me from one end of the University of Alaska Anchorage campus, where I have just gotten out of class, and the opposite end, where my next one starts. Although it's an evening class and the traffic has somewhat dissipated, there is still a definite early-semester buzz in the air: confusion, anxiety, tension. Well, I probably shouldn't try to limit that to campus life.

Throwing my backpack into the passenger seat, I turn on the engine, and slowly begin to back out. This is the part where I almost lose the back half of my truck. If not more.

As I see the car fade off into the distance at speeds that tout the immortal feeling of youth while falling well short of promoting a healthy lifestyle, I notice the single hand firmly cupping the driver's cell phone to their ear, and a detached conversation taking place which presumably bore no mention of the fact that it could have been their last.

It's happened to you. Don't lie. It doesn't have to be at UAA. It happens in the Fred Meyer parking lot, or Costco, or Wal-Mart. Good God does it happen at Wal-Mart. It doesn't have to happen in your car, either. You've seen the mock space shuttle launches when trying to cross the street; inches separating your toes from a random Hummer's tires.

It's not a partisan issue. Just as cross walks and stop signs are not partisan issues. Or as the old saying goes: "There's no such thing as a Republican or Democratic pothole."

But not according to the Alaska Standard contributor, Alex Gimarc, who mounted a pious partisan hack job of an attack article regarding proposed legislation that would join Alaska with 23 other states in having laws that attach restrictions to cell phone use while driving.

Instead of appealing to legitimate Libertarian values that arguably give teeth to questions regarding whether this legislation steps over a boundary from the standpoint of government interference with our every day lives, Gimarc has chosen to threaten civil disobedience in response to (not exactly the most popular Democrat) Rep. Mike Doogan's proposal (which also begs into question the argument that we should limit the legislation to require hands-free devices in lieu of an all-out ban. But that didn't carry enough anti-establishment vitriol, apparently), and is furthermore appalled by Republican representative and candidate for lieutenant governor Jay Ramras, who according to Gimarc, "fell all over himself promising to give this important topic a fair hearing in the Legislature this session."

Wouldn't want to have the bill discussed, pondered, or improved, would we?

Gimarc offers a very pander-heavy perspective:

"Make no mistake. This argument is not about whether cell phones are a good thing or not. Rather it is about the age old argument between liberty and safety. Are we Alaskans prepared to give up yet another slice of our freedom -- the ability to talk on the phone while driving -- for safety -- some unspecified reduction in accident rates on our highways?"

How much time did you spend reflecting on whether or not this issue, this proposal, was about the good or bad nature of cell phones?

An exercise conducted by The Journal of the Human Factors and Ergonomics Society in Salt Lake City, Utah conducted a well-cited study back in 2006 entitled "A Comparison of the Cell Phone Driver



and the Drunk Driver." The following is what they found, and what has inspired more and more case studies that continue to trickle into the public domain:

"Method: We used a high-fidelity driving simulator to compare the performance of cell phone drivers with drivers who were intoxicated from ethanol (i.e., blood alcohol concentration at 0.08% weight/volume).

Results: When drivers were conversing on either a handheld or hands-free cell phone, their braking reactions were delayed and they were involved in more traffic accidents than when they were not conversing on a cell phone. By contrast, when drivers were intoxicated from ethanol they exhibited a more aggressive driving style, following closer to the vehicle immediately in front of them and applying more force while braking.

Conclusion: When driving conditions and time on task were controlled for, the impairments associated with using a cell phone while driving can be as profound as those associated with driving while drunk."

And it doesn't stop there. The National Safety Council, this month, released a report which estimates "at least 28 percent of all traffic crashes -- or at least 1.6 million crashes each year -- are caused by drivers using cell phones and texting."

Gimarc remains unphased and belligerent, using familiar tag lines, such as "the free market already tells us how safe the use of cell phones during driving is."

Yeah, you're right. Read all the stuff I just typed.

What else does the free market tell you during your talks, sir?

"Are we willing to put ourselves in the position of asking our government permission to make a phone call while driving? I for one choose freedom and would remind Mr. Doogan, Ramras and the ADN that it is not any of their damned business what I do or do not do in my vehicle as long as I don't hit anything."

Except this is utter nonsense. Alaska Statutes Title 28: Motor Vehicles, Chapter 35: Offenses and Accidents, Sections 10 through 410 (AS 28.35.10-410), spell out in no uncertain terms that acts such as driving without an owner's consent, drunken driving, driving without a license, driving a stolen car, among many, many other offenses, are expressly forbidden by state law.

In a simple appeal to common sense, if "negligent" or "reckless" driving infractions are not specific enough to extend to cell phone usage, than we need to make them.

But, possibly the most egregious and detached statement offered by Mr. Gimarc was in this one liner:

"I come from the 'you break it; you pay for it' school of public safety."

How does one exactly pay for someone else's son or daughter who is killed in an auto accident? This is arrogance over content. While I believe that the conversation over where governmental involvement becomes intrusion is a phenomenally important one, I don't believe that hiding behind the right to privacy grants us the right to use our cars as weapons for the sole purpose of checking our voice mail messages. Again, at least theoretically, we don't drive drunk. We don't drive without a license. We have to put on seat belts, obey signs and traffic lights, yield to pedestrians, and pull over and either accept the penalties or challenge them in court when we are accused of breaking the law in a way that puts others, and ourselves, at risk. Let's not take the referees completely out of the game, when lives are at risk, simply to make a political point.

Can't we opt to err on the side of preventing careless and avoidable deaths? By stating that, should this legislation pass, we must self-righteously defy it as some middle finger to Obama, you're not seeing the reality: The statistics are in. It's not a hoax. Kids are getting hurt, and some are dying. You can't just see them as Republicans or Democrats. Their deaths are tragedies. Avoidable tragedies. How dare you politicize this?

Whether you really believe that we should have the right to do anything in our cars, so long as we

"don't hit anyone," are you prepared to tell me that you're going to support that statement when it's your loved one coming down the other side of a two-way highway on a cold, icy night?

*John Aronno studies political science at the University of Alaska Anchorage. This opinion piece originally appeared on his blog, Alaska Commons. Talk of the Tundra features commentary by Alaskans from across the state. The views expressed are the writers' own and are not endorsed by Alaska Dispatch.*

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### Member Comments

Posted By: Crosspicker @ 01.24.2010 7:14 PM

With numbers like 1.6M floating around regarding cell phone related collisions, I find remarks made by Mr. Gimarc to be fairly selfish. Neither am I happy about having my driving freedoms further regulated, however if we were capable of self regulating certain aspects of our lives related to public safety, they would not need to be regulated by the legislature. After having worked my share of traffic collisions for a premier law enforcement agency, I found that the carnage produced by a cell phone driver/operator, versus that of a drunk driver looked strangely similiar.

Mr. Gimarc's attitude is and typical of those we continue to see driving without due regard for the rest of us on the highways of this state, or any other. Blame it on the other guy, stomp on the gas pedal and leave a wake of carnage for someone else to worry about, seems to sum it up.

+0