

Car Phones and Safety

The use of car phones and cellular phones has grown at a phenomenal rate over the past several years. Mobile phones permit their users to conduct business while traveling, allow families to check in with each other, and provide a measure of heretofore unheard-of safety – since help is literally a phone call away when needed, no matter where you are. But despite the positive aspects of both car phones and cellular phones used in cars, they have also created a new safety hazard.

Using a phone or a CB radio while driving is a distraction, just as changing tapes or CDs, or adjusting the radio, or lighting up a cigarette, distracts you from driving. Anything that takes your attention away from the full time task of driving can be *hazardous to your health*. The more tasks a driver tries to perform simultaneously, the more likely it is that one of the tasks will suffer. New drivers and the elderly are most likely to be affected by the distraction, but no one is immune.

A study by the Rochester Institute of Technology showed that drivers who have cellular phones in their cars have a *34 percent greater risk* of being involved in accidents. In one recent case, a driver going through an intersection dropped her car phone. As she was picking up the phone, the light turned red and she broadsided another car, sending its driver to the hospital with serious injuries. Make sure *you* use car phones and cellular phones in a safe manner.

When you dial a car phone, you must take your eyes off the road, and at least one hand off the wheel, for several seconds to punch in the numbers, yet some people perform this function while they are driving, even when they are traveling at 50 mph in heavy bumper-to-bumper traffic. Under the same conditions – driving in fast or heavy traffic – would you feel safe if you *closed your eyes and took at least one hand off the wheel* for several seconds? Safe driving always requires that you keep your eye on the road, and often requires the accurate use of *both* your hands on the steering wheel.

Remember these safety tips:

- Use a car phone *only* while parked safely.
- If you plan to use a car phone while driving, install a “hands free” phone. This normally means you won’t be able to use your cellular phone.
- Use the phone’s built-in memory to dial frequently-called numbers.
- Don’t engage in emotional, stressful or frustrating calls while driving.
- If you use a portable phone, secure it with a seat belt in the passenger seat so it doesn’t become a missile during quick stops or evasive maneuvers.
- When driving conditions deteriorate, stop talking on the phone, so that you can give your full attention to the task of driving safely.

LOSS CONTROL FUND

For more information, contact your local Hartford agent or your Hartford Loss Control Consultant. Visit The Hartford's Loss Control web site at <http://www.thehartford.com/corporate/losscontrol/>

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