



2021 is finally here and, even though it still feels a little too much like 2020, I am optimistic that it will end better than its unwelcome predecessor. I hope that with every day that passes and every vaccination adminstered, we are one step closer to a return to normal.

But the COVID-19 vaccine is not the only new protective measure being rolled out in 2021. As of January 1, Virginia House Bill 874 prohibits "any person from holding a handheld personal communications device while driving a motor vehicle." This bill actually took effect on July 1, 2020, with enforcement depayed until January 1, 2021, to allow time for educating the public on its provisions.

The language of HB874 marks a substantial shift from the previous law that only prohibited reading or writing text massages or emails and holding a personal communications device while driving in a work zone. The new law recognizes the potential risk that having a mobile phone in a driver's hand poses to everyone on the road and elimnates the need for the police to try to determine what that driver was using it for at the time it is observed. Violating the law is punishable, for a first offense, by a fine of $125 and, for a second or subsequent offense, by a fine of $250. Breaking the law in a highway work zone is punishable by a mandatory $250 fine.

And do not forget—the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Adminstation rule prohibits using a handheld mobile phone while driving a commercial motor vehicle. Violation of that rule can result in fines of up to $2,700 for drivers and up to $11,000 from employers who allow or require drivers to use a handheld communications device while driving.

If that isnt enough incentive, the please consider this:

- Accidents involving distracted drivers claim over 3000 lives and injure nearly another 400,000 people in the U.S. each year.
- Reading a text message takes your eyes off the road for approximately 5 seconds……and at 55 mph, that is like driving the length of a football field with your eyes closed.
- You are 1.3 times more likely to crash when talking or listening to someone talking while driving; 1.4 times more likely when reaching for your phone while driving; 2.8 times more likely when dialing your phone while driving; and 23 times more likely when texting while driving.

Please keep all of this in mind and put that phone down while you are driving. It truly could save someone's life.

Please stay safe, stay healthy, and stay connected. Looking forward to seeing or talking with you soon!

-Dennis