



How handheld devices can factor into your road safety policy

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Across Canada, using handheld devices while behind the wheel is considered distracted driving. Distracted driving is illegal and considered a form of impairment, similar to driving while intoxicated. According to the Government of Ontario, one person is injured in a distracted driving collision every half hour. Penalties for distracted driving can include fines, demerit points, license suspensions, or worse, depending on your driving history.

The best way to avoid penalties is by simply putting down handheld devices while driving. Handheld devices can include:

- Mobile phones
- Tablets
- Laptops
- Music players
- Non-mounted GPS devices

Examples of prohibited activities can include texting, dialing, scrolling, checking emails, and selecting music or destinations.

What is a road safety policy?

In addition to complying with the law, you can develop your own road safety policy and add it to your business' risk management program. A road safety policy can include best practices, dos and don'ts, and additional resources for employees that may be driving on the job.

Enforcing a strict policy on handheld device use while operating motor vehicles, equipment, and machinery can help inform employees and possibly mitigate the risk of a potential accident.

Consider highlighting the following points in your road safety policy:

- Pre-plan your route and designate stops where you can lawfully park to safely check your voicemails, text messages, and emails.
- Store handheld devices before operating motor vehicles, equipment, and machinery.
- Avoid talking on the phone (even with hands-free technology) in hazardous situations, poor weather conditions, and in areas you're unfamiliar with.
- Don't drive when you're stressed or emotional as your mental state can amplify distracted driving, especially when your job involves using hands-free technology.
- Keep both hands on the wheel and eyes on the road.

When can I use my handheld device?

There are lawful ways to use handheld devices while operating motor vehicles, such as:

- Calling 911 in emergency situations while you're safely pulled over with the hazard lights turned on.
- Using hands-free technology, such as Bluetooth, to control devices through voice commands, steering wheel controls, and earpieces.
- Viewing a pre-set and mounted GPS for maps and directions.
- Viewing screens that display the status of systems associated with your motor vehicle, such as collision avoidance systems, instruments, and gauges.

Laws and penalties for distracted driving

Consider educating staff on your provincial legislation and provide training on proper driving protocols to eliminate driver distractions.

But no matter the laws, keep in mind that talking on the phone through hands-free technology can still be a major source of distraction. And at the end of the day, the primary responsibility of a driver is to drive safely.

To see the laws and penalties by province/territory, click on a location below:

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