



Loss Control Department
Technical Information Paper Series

Car Phones and Safety

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Car Phones and Safety

The use of car phones and cellular phones has grown at a phenomenal rate over the past five years; this growth shows no likelihood of slowing down. 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 all of the positive aspects of both car phones and cellular phones used in cars, there also is the potential for new safety hazards.

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. 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.

When you dial a car phone, you must take your eyes off the road to punch in the numbers, yet some people perform this function while they are driving, even when they are traveling at 50 mph or while 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* for the same period of time—several seconds—that it takes to dial the phone? Safe driving often requires the accurate use of *both* your hands on the steering wheel; however, while you are using a cellular phone, you are necessarily engaged in “one hand operation.” If a child darted out in front of you from between two parked cars, or if you had a blowout at 55 mph, do you *really* think you could effectively control your vehicle with only one hand on the steering wheel? Tests show that this is not likely.

In order to receive the benefits of using a phone in your vehicle while minimizing the drawbacks, remember these safety tips:

- Use a car phone *only* while you are safely parked.
- If you plan to use a car phone while driving, install a “hands free” 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.

An ongoing study by the Rochester Institute of Technology has shown that drivers who have cellular phones in their cars have a *34 percent greater risk* of being involved in accidents. In one case, a driver who was going through an intersection dropped her car phone inside the car. 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 safely.

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