
NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General

NEW LAW CRACKS DOWN ON DISTRACTED DRIVING

VICTORIA – B.C. roads will be safer following legislative changes to prevent the use of hand-held cellphones, portable electronic devices and text messaging while driving, Solicitor General Kash Heed announced today.

“We’re taking action today because British Columbians have made it clear they support stronger restrictions on cellphones and other devices that take a driver’s hands off the wheel and their eyes from the road,” said Heed. “Simply put, you cannot talk, type or dial on any hand-held device while driving.”

Changes to the Motor Vehicle Act (MVA) upon legislative approval are to take effect on Jan. 1, 2010. At that point, only hands-free cellphones and devices that require one touch to activate will be permitted. Drivers in the Graduated Licensing Program (GLP) will not be permitted to use hands-free phones in addition to other prohibited activity.

A new fine in the amount of \$167 will begin to be levied on Feb. 1, 2010. If drivers are caught texting or emailing they will receive an additional three penalty points. Further, drivers in the GLP will receive the \$167 fine and three penalty points for any violation of this legislation.

“As physicians, we often see the consequences of those injured in a car crash because a distracted driver was using a cellphone,” said Dr. Brian Brodie, president of the BC Medical Association. “This is preventative legislation that focuses on being responsible with new technology in a way that doesn’t put people’s lives at risk.”

Clayton Pecknold, vice-president of the B.C. Association of Chiefs of Police said, “Police have been looking forward to these changes because it gives us another enforcement tool to create safer roads in this province.”

According to independent research and studies, cellphone use while driving is the number-one cause of distracted driving. On average, about 117 people die each year in B.C. and 1,400 are sent to hospital because someone was not paying attention behind the wheel.

In the coming months, government will launch an awareness campaign to educate drivers on the new law and the importance of paying attention to the road, pedestrians and other cars around them.

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A backgrounder follows.

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BACKGROUND

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MOTOR VEHICLE ACT CHANGES

Prohibited actions and devices

- No operating or holding hand-held cellphones or other electronic devices.
- No sending or reading emails and/or texting (e.g., BlackBerry, PDA, cellphone).
- No operating or holding hand-held music or portable gaming devices (e.g., MP3 players, iPods).
- No manual programming or adjusting GPS systems, whether built into the vehicle or not, while driving. Settings must be programmed before driving.

Permitted actions and devices

- Hands-free cellphones that are built in or securely fixed to the vehicle, and used by pressing a single button - once only – in order to activate a hands-free device for incoming or outgoing calls.
- Pre-programmed and voice-activated GPS devices.
- Two-way radios for industry (e.g., trucking, logging, oil and gas).
- Any of the above devices can be used if the vehicle is legally parked and not impeding traffic.
- Call 9-1-1 to report an emergency.

Graduated License Drivers (GLP)

- In addition to the above restrictions and permitted actions, new drivers are prohibited from using hands-free communications devices, (e.g., cellphones), while driving.

Exemptions to the legislation include police, fire and ambulance personnel who may need to make calls in the performance of their duties, and motorists who need to call 9-1-1.

These changes bring British Columbia in line with the provinces of Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland. Alberta recently announced that it intends to introduce similar distracted driving legislation this fall.

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