

Even a hands-free device can be distracting when on the road.

Safe driving at work starts with company culture

By Jesse Marchand

Staying safe on the road requires a commitment from employees and employers.

Distracted driving is the second leading contributing factor in traffic fatalities, behind speed and ahead of impaired driving, and it contributes to more than one in four deaths on B.C. roads. A recent Ipsos survey conducted by ICBC showed that approximately one-third of respondents admitted to using their phone at least some of the time while driving. The good news is that crashes from distracted driving at work can be prevented through policies, safe work procedures and practices, and support for your workers.

The *Motor Vehicle Act* prohibits driving while using a handheld electronic device. And with good reason: motor vehicle incidents are the leading cause of traumatic death in the workplace. It's not just the drivers at risk, it's everyone who shares the road with a distracted driver.

Even the use of a hands-free device is not risk-free. In fact, studies have shown that drivers who are talking on a cellphone lose about 50 percent of what is visually

happening around them. While hands-free cellphone use is permitted under law, you are always better off pulling over and parking in a safe space before making or taking a phone call.

If you're a worker, you have a responsibility to put the devices away when on the road, but employers have rights and responsibilities too. Mark Ordeman, acting manager of Transportation and Occupational Road Safety at WorkSafeBC, notes, "It is important to highlight that an employer's legislated responsibility to provide a safe workplace includes a vehicle when it is operated for work purposes. That includes remedying any workplace conditions — like using a smartphone — that are hazardous to the health or safety of the employer's workers."

In addition to the specific employer responsibility, being distracted by a device also falls under the general-duty clause in section 2.2 of the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation: "Despite the absence of a specific requirement, all work must be carried out without undue risk of injury or occupational disease to any person."

The following four tips can help you create safe working conditions that will encourage your workers to keep their eyes on the road.

1 Create a policy and safe work practices.

Employers must establish policies and safe work practices that clearly spell out expectations around the use of electronic devices. Consult with your workers and members of the joint occupational safety committee when developing this information.

2 Communicate the policy and practices. It's not enough to make a policy and leave it in a binder somewhere. Communicate your electronic device policy and practices to your managers, workers, and contractors — often. Remember, employers must provide their workers with information, instruction, training, and supervision to ensure their safety.

3 Support your workers. Direct your workers to create an “I’m behind the wheel” voice message, online status, or a text auto-reply before they begin driving. You can also be clear with clients, customers, and fellow staff that your employees can’t answer calls, texts, and emails while driving. If you have a workplace that requires urgent responses from people on the road, make sure your policy includes and encourages pulling over to a safe space before responding.

4 Set an example. As an employer, you should not only refrain from using electronic devices while driving, but you should also not expect workers who are driving to get back to you right away.

For more information, visit <https://roadsafetyatwork.ca/tool-kits/distracted-driving/call-to-action/> 📞

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