

Cell Phone Safety

Cell phones can be very useful tools while on the road: for reporting accidents, in the event of emergencies or for other roadside assistance. However, unnecessary overuse of your cell phone while driving is now not only a potential safety hazard, but effective July 1, 2008 is also prohibited by California law. This new law requires that drivers must use a hands-free device when using a wireless telephone; most common options are corded headsets, Bluetooth technology or car-kit speakers. While the easy answer is to wait until you arrive at your destination to make phone calls, this is often not a realistic possibility.

Note that the law allows a driver to make emergency calls to emergency services agencies. Also, if you are driving a commercial vehicle, you are permitted to use push-to-talk phones until July 1, 2011. Be aware that unlawful use of your cell phone while driving will result in a base fine of \$20, however court costs can increase the violation to nearly \$80, as well as substantial fine increases (almost \$200) with subsequent violations. You can still dial and receive calls, but remember that you cannot hold your phone up to your ear. If caught, law enforcement officers will pull you over and give you a potentially hefty fine.

In addition to the use hands-free devices in your car, there are other simple tips to ensure your safety and the safety of others. Avoid making calls in poor visibility, extreme weather or road conditions that require increased focus and maneuvering. Also, avoid making calls that could potentially require heavy concentration or emotional reactions. Program the numbers you dial most frequently into your phone to allow greater focus on the road, and less focus on making calls. While sometimes the use of cell phones is unavoidable, using your cell phone in a safe and responsible manner can potentially increase your safety on the road.

