



# NEWS RELEASE

08-028

**Today's Date:** Tuesday, April 1, 2008  
**District:** 1 - Eureka  
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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### NEW CELL PHONE LAWS AIM TO MAKE DRIVING SAFER

**Eureka** – The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) District 1 reminds motorists that beginning July 1, 2008, it will be illegal to use hand-held wireless telephones while driving.

The new law allows motorists, 18-years-old and older, to only use a hands-free device to talk on their wireless telephone while operating a motor vehicle. Drivers under the age of 18 may not use a cell phone, pager, laptop or any other electronic communication device to speak or text while driving.

The California Highway Patrol has more information regarding this law at [http://www.chp.ca.gov/pdf/media/cell\\_phone\\_faq.pdf](http://www.chp.ca.gov/pdf/media/cell_phone_faq.pdf)

Frequently asked questions from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) web site about cell phones are listed below:

#### **Q. Does cell phone use while driving cause traffic crashes?**

**A.** Research shows that driving while using a cell phone can pose a serious cognitive distraction and degrade driver performance. The data are insufficient to quantify crashes caused by cell phone use specifically, but NHTSA estimates that driver distraction from all sources contributes to 25 percent of all police-reported traffic crashes.

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**Q. Is it safe to use hands-free (headset, speakerphone, or other device) cell phones while driving?**

**A.** The available research indicates that whether it is a hands-free or hand-held cell phone, the cognitive distraction is significant enough to degrade a driver's performance. This can cause a driver to miss key visual and audio cues needed to avoid a crash.

**Q. In an emergency, should I use my cell phone while driving?**

**A.** As a general rule, drivers should make every effort to move to a safe place off the road before using a cell phone. However, in emergencies, drivers must use their judgment regarding the urgency of the situation and the necessity to use a cell phone while driving.

**Q. Is talking on a cell phone any worse than having a conversation with someone in the car?**

**A.** Any activity a driver engages while driving has the potential to distract the driver from the primary task of driving. Some research, comparing cell phone use to passenger conversations while driving, shows each to be equally risky, while others show cell phone use to be more risky.

A significant difference between the two is the fact that a passenger can monitor the driving situation along with the driver and pause for, or alert the driver to, potential hazards, whereas a person on the other end of the phone line is unaware of the roadway situation.

**Q. What do the studies say about the relative risk of cell phone use when compared to other tasks like eating or drinking?**

**A.** The current research does not provide a definitive answer as to which behavior is riskier. In a controlled study, comparing eating and operating a voice-activated cell phone to continuously operating a CD player, it was found that the CD player operation was more distracting than the other activities. In a test track study conducted by NHTSA, the results showed that manual dialing was about as distracting as grooming/eating, but less distracting than reading or changing CDs. It is also important to keep in mind that some activities are carried out more frequently and for longer periods and may result in greater risk.

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