

## MOBILE TELEPHONES

### POLICY

Murcotts Driving Excellence recognises and accepts its obligations under Occupational Health and Safety legislation to provide a safe place of work. Accordingly the company's Driver Management Policy acknowledges that this obligation extends to vehicles when employees drive directly or indirectly in the course of their work.

As an extension of that policy this document provides directions about the use of mobile telephones while driving.

These directions apply to all employees who drive vehicles either leased, hired supplied as tool of trade, as part of salary packaging or through a novated lease, or who drive their private vehicle for work purposes. Driving for work purposes includes journeys to and from work.

### THE RISK

The use of mobile phones when driving is a major road safety problem. A recent Australian Transport Safety Bureau report states that 43% of drivers answer their phones, 24% make calls, 16% read text messages and 8% send text messages, while driving.

ATSB Report -Community Attitudes to Road Safety May 2006

Apart from the obvious distraction from dialling, answering calls, reading and texting, research indicates that conversations on the telephone use essential mental resources necessary for safe driving.

Hands free kits reduce the risk only slightly because it is the conversation itself with another person not in the vehicle that places extra demands on the driver, creating serious distraction from the driving task, reducing concentration thus significantly increasing crash risk.

Given that vehicle use accounts for nearly 50% of all workplace deaths there is an overwhelming need to minimise the risks of occupational driving.

### ROAD LAW

Victoria first banned the use of hand-held mobile phones while driving in 1988, NSW in 1989 followed by other States and Territories.

*Generally State legislation and the Australian Road Rule 300 prohibits a driver using a hand-held mobile phone while the vehicle is in motion or stationary but not parked.*

This policy recognises this minimum legal requirement but provides for a higher level of safety management in relation to mobile phone use in vehicles.

### MOBILE PHONE USE GUIDELINES

All employees and sub-contractors must comply with the following minimum standards:

- The use of mobile telephones at all times when driving including when stationary such as at traffic lights or in heavy traffic, should be avoided.
- If a mobile telephone is used while driving a "Hands free" system must be used without exception.

- Text messaging while driving is illegal.
- It is recommended that you switch off phones and allow calls to go through to a message bank or Voicemail and collect and respond to them, when stationary. Doing this means that the efficiency of the mobile phone is not lost and your safety is not at risk.
- Allow extra journey time to STOP to use the phone.
- If traffic or road conditions are demanding more of your concentration, do not answer or make calls.
- Ask passengers to operate the phone, relay messages and take notes, etc.
- If extreme circumstances or emergencies require the use of the mobile phone while driving, keep calls brief and simple.
- If using a a mobile phone in conjunction with a hands free kit while driving, reduce speed and increase the following distance to vehicles in front to compensate for increased reaction time. For example double your safety gap or cushion from say 2 seconds to 4 seconds in dry conditions, more if conditions are wet or traffic is heavy.

In a study of “Cognitive load and detection thresholds in car following situations(“Safety implications for using mobile (cellular) telephones while driving” conducted by the Department of Psychology, University of Helsinki, Finland) it was concluded that neither a hands-free option nor a voice controlled interface removes the safety problems associated with the use of mobile phones in a car.

During each trial the lead car started to decelerate at an average of 0.47 m/s<sup>2</sup> while the participant either looked at the car in front (control), continuously dialed series of three random integers on a numeric keypad (divided visual attention), or performed a memory and addition task (non-visual attention). The results indicated that drivers' detection ability was impaired by about 0.5 second in terms of brake reaction time and almost 1second in terms of time-to-collision, when they were doing the non-visual task whilst driving. This impairment was similar to when the drivers were dividing their visual attention between the road ahead and dialing numbers on the keypad.

- Before driving program the mobile phone for voice activation or hot key facility.
- Only insert and remove phone from the hands free cradle or power on/off or check messages or key in numbers or information only when the vehicle is stationary and park-brake “ON”.
- Ensure hands free mounting is near the top of the dash to assist in keeping your vision up.
- Do not attempt to read phone directories or take notes whilst driving.
- For security take the mobile phone with you when you leave the vehicle.

## EVIDENCE SUPPORTING THE LAW AND THIS POLICY

The link between using a mobile phone when driving and road crashes is based on the distraction factor. Drivers need to apply their visual and mental resources to the driving task at all times.

A study by the Canadian Transport Authority shows that using a hands-free phone behind the wheel is as distracting as holding the phone, with drivers slowing while dialling or talking, swerving in and out of their lane, and having trouble remembering signs.

A more recent Australian study (Griffith University 2002) undertaken in real road conditions showed that drivers using hands-free mobile phones had problems manoeuvring and controlling the car, approaching a stationary vehicle at a traffic light, and avoiding obstacles.

Monash University Accident Research Centre’s policy directs staff that “no mobile phones (including hands-free) are to be used whilst driving” due to the increased risk of crashing and it cites the following:

Using mobile phones while driving increases the risk of being involved in a vehicle crash (Donoho, 1996). A study using an epidemiological case-control design found that talking on mobile phones in the car for more than 50 minutes a month was associated with a 5.59-fold increased risk of being involved in a crash (Violanti and Marshall, 1996). A separate study performed by the University of Toronto (cited in Anonymous, 1997a) indicates that talking on a mobile phone while driving quadruples the risk of having a crash. This is the same risk as driving with a BAC at the legal limit. The study also indicates that hands-free devices offer no advantage over traditional hand-held devices.

Extract from MUARC's Car Policy from internet <http://www.monash.edu.au/muarc/about/carpolicy.html>

The risk of being involved in a fatal crash while using a mobile telephone has been said to range between 4 and 9 times higher than when not using a phone.

(Cell Phone use may raise collision risk. (1997). *IIHS Status Report*, Vol 32, N°3, March 22, 1997; Violanti, J.M. (1998). Cellular phones and fatal traffic collisions. *Accident Analysis and Prevention*, Vol. 30, N°4, pp. 519-524).

The two most common types of crashes associated with mobile telephone use are “loss of control/run off road” crashes (on freeways and larger highways) and “rear end crashes” (in built up areas). Rear end crashes were more frequent for hand-held mobile use than for hands-free mobile use.

(Bruehning, E., Haas, I., Mäder, H., Pfafferott, I., & Poeppel-Decker, M. (1998). Telephone use while driving and traffic safety. *VTI Konferens, N° 10A, Part 9*, pp. 69-79; *Swedish National Road and Transport Research Institute, Linköping, Sweden*).

The frequency with which vehicles with hand-held mobile phones are involved in rear-end crashes in built-up areas is significantly higher than vehicles with hands-free telephones and cars without telephones.

(Bruehning, E., Haas, I., Mäder, H., Pfafferott, I., & Poeppel-Decker, M. (1998). Telephone use while driving and traffic safety. *VTI Konferens, N° 10A, Part 9*, pp. 69-79; *Swedish National Road and Transport Research Institute, Linköping, Sweden*).

The results of a study of car-following behaviour while using a mobile phone showed that drivers' detection ability in a closing headway situation was impaired by about 0.5 seconds in terms of brake reaction time, and almost one second in terms of time-to collision.

These results are similar to findings of previous research (e.g. Brookhuis, DeVries, & DeWaard, 1991).

(Lamble, D., Kauranen, T., Laasko, M. & Summala, H. (1999). Cognitive load and detection thresholds in car following situations: Safety implications for using mobile (cellular) telephones while driving. *Accident Analysis and Prevention*, Vol. 31, pp. 617-623).

## DEFINITIONS

1. Vehicle is a Workplace. Under Australian OH&S law vehicles driven for the purposes of employment whether a “Tool of the Trade”, “Novated Lease”, supplied as a component of “Salary Packaging”, or where a car allowance is paid, or the employee is using his or her private vehicle for work journeys, the vehicle may be deemed a “Workplace” and all health and safety legal requirements apply.
2. Mobile Phone. A hand held device that allows the making or receiving of phone calls, text messages, picture messaging, internet services, MP3 player etc.
3. Hands free kit. Ear piece or loudspeaker with microphone that when connected to the phone allows the mobile phone user to not have to hold the phone in their hand.
4. Stationary or Parked Vehicle. A stationary vehicle may be stopped at traffic lights or in heavy traffic but a parked vehicle must be stopped with the park brake and in a place where parking is permitted.
5. Driver distraction is the key issue. Janssen 2000 defines driver distractions as “capture of the driver's attention by information that is irrelevant to the driving situation to a degree where insufficient information is left for the primary task”.

Sourced from internet at <http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/pdf/nrd-13/FinalInternetForumReport.pdf> 6 June 2006.