



Insurance

BACKGROUND

Distracted driving is an issue all across North America and around the world. International research shows that 20-30 % of all collisions involve driver distraction, and goes well beyond cell phone use. Traffic collisions impose enormous costs on our society and anything we can do to improve safety provides tremendous benefits to all Albertans. 90% of collisions are due to driver error, and it is the aim of all traffic legislation in Alberta to change driving attitudes and behaviors thus reducing the number of injuries and fatalities on our highways. Not to mention reducing associated costs both to taxpayers and loved ones of someone who has been hurt or killed in a crash.

WHEN AND WHERE THE NEW LAW APPLIES

The new legislation is set to come into force as of September 1, 2011. Alberta Police and Peace Officers will NOT be providing a grace period for drivers to get used to the new rules. The laws apply to drivers of vehicles on any urban or rural highway in Alberta. This includes any street, road, parking lot, driveway or alley. Basically anywhere that the public is normally permitted to drive whether it is on public or private property. The term “vehicle” includes passenger automobiles, motorcycles, motor homes, truck tractors, farm vehicles, horse-drawn wagons and even bicycles. The laws do not apply to vehicles that are off the highway (see above examples) or that are lawfully parked. The laws will apply to vehicles that are stopped on a highway; for example you cannot stop on the shoulder of a rural highway or wait until you are stuck at a red light or train crossing to make a call on your cell phone (or engage in any of the other restricted activities). Legally park your vehicle off of the highway before picking up your phone or programming your GPS. Stopping or parking on the shoulder of a provincial highway is only permitted for emergencies and vehicle breakdown.

WHAT ACTIVITIES ARE RESTRICTED?

- Holding, manipulating or talking on hand-held cell phone devices (that’s right, you can get a ticket for just holding your phone while you drive).
- Texting/emailing.
- Using electronic devices like laptop computers, cameras, video entertainment displays (eg. DVD player), and programming portable audio devices (eg. iPod, mp3 player).
- Manually entering information on GPS units.
- Reading printed material like a book, magazine or map.
- Writing, printing or sketching.
- Personal grooming (eg. Combing your hair, applying makeup or using an electric shaver).

WHAT ACTIVITIES ARE ALLOWED?

- Using a cell phone in hands-free mode (the device is not held in the driver’s hand and is activated by voice or a single touch to the device).
- Using an earphone or Bluetooth device (if it is used in a hands-free or voice-activated manner).
- Drinking beverages such as coffee, water or pop.
- Eating a snack (within reason; holding a bowl of cereal in one hand and a spoon in the other is going to get you a ticket).
- Smoking.
- Talking with passengers.
- Listening to portable audio devices (as long as it is set up before you begin driving).
- Changing the channel on your car radio or using built-in audio controls.
- Using a GPS navigation system (as long as the system is affixed to the vehicle and programmed before you begin driving or the system is voice activated. You cannot hold the unit or manually enter information while driving).
- Using a gauge, instrument, device or system that provides information about the vehicle’s systems, operation or location.