

Mobile phone usage

Mobile phone usage is a distraction that is both prevalent and dangerous. The Transport Accident Commission (TAC) in Victoria, advise that mobile phone usage whilst driving is the third most common 'on the spot' infringement.

The most common crash types that result from mobile phone usage are "rear end collision" and "run off the road". Research indicates that using a mobile phone increases the driver's risk of crash by four times.⁹

How do mobile phones distract drivers?

- ▼ **Visually** – e.g. looking at the screen instead of the road.
- ▼ **Auditory** – e.g. when focussing on sounds like a ring tone or voice so that fewer environmental sounds are heard.
- ▼ **Physically** – e.g. when a mobile phone is being operated manually.
- ▼ **Cognitively** – e.g. when the driver is thinking about the conversation they are conducting and not the driving task.¹²

Mobile phone usage and the law

- ▼ In Australia, it is illegal to physically operate a hand-held mobile phone while driving.
- ▼ Physically holding a phone when your vehicle is stationary but not parked (e.g. in traffic) is also illegal.
- ▼ A driver may only use the phone to make or receive an audio call (not video) if the body of the phone is secured to the vehicle, in a purposely designed cradle, while being used.
- ▼ Learner and P1 drivers are not permitted to use a phone including hands-free while driving.¹⁰
- ▼ Emergency vehicles, police vehicles or other special vehicles maybe exempt from mobile phone usage laws.¹⁰

What type of hands-free cradles are available?

- ▼ **Windshield mount** – A windshield mounted unit can provide a "fixed" mount but there are safety considerations in relation to where the unit is mounted. It is recommended to mount in the bottom right hand corner of the windshield, as low as possible.
- ▼ **Cup mount** – Cup mounts can be an excellent way to securely mount a phone, especially for vehicles that have cup holders towards the front of the centre console.⁸
- ▼ **Other mounts** – These can include dashboard and air vent mounts.

What effects does mobile phone usage have on driving performance?

- ▼ slower reactions – studies show a 20-40% increase in reaction times
- ▼ speed variations
- ▼ difficulty keeping within the lane
- ▼ reduced awareness from surroundings – during phone use drivers fail to take notice of relevant information as a result of looking at the road for shorter time spans
- ▼ increased stopping distance
- ▼ less controlled braking
- ▼ mobile phone use requires greater mental effort.¹²³⁴⁵

Tips for staying safe

- ▼ Pull over safely and park the vehicle before using your phone
- ▼ Utilise voicemail and return calls when you reach your destination
- ▼ Plan breaks in your trips to contact colleagues and advise them not to call when you know you will be driving
- ▼ Never read or send text messages while driving
- ▼ If you do have to take a call using a hands-free kit:
 - ▼ Keep conversations short
 - ▼ Avoid complex or emotional conversations
 - ▼ Advise callers you are driving
 - ▼ Only use hands-free devices in low traffic
 - ▼ Avoid calls in heavy traffic

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