NRSPP
NATIONAL ROAD SAFETY
PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

Policy paper:
A guide to developing an effective safe mobile phone use policy

Introduction

The mobile phone has revolutionised the way we communicate. It has not only permeated every facet of our lives – work, personal and social – but has brought them together into the one space. And because our mobiles are always at arm's reach, they have the potential to impact everything we do, including our ability to drive a car safely.

Using a mobile phone while driving is a growing and concerning behaviour for organisations. There is a large body of road safety research suggesting that mobile phones are just one of many distractions that have the ability to divert a driver's attention away from the road on a daily basis. And the evidence is clear: taking your eyes off the road poses the most dangerous and greatest risk when driving a vehicle.

This Fact Sheet provides a synopsis of the NRSPP mobile phone policy guide, which aims to help organisations of all sizes successfully implement a policy for managing the safe use of mobiles in vehicles. The guide's aims to change the organisation's culture of employee mobile phone use and seeks to extend safer usage from the workplace to employees' time away from work and in the broader community.

Why implement a Safe Mobile Phone Use Policy

Organisations have a responsibility to provide their employees with a safe working environment, which also extends to when they are driving vehicles. Therefore, it is critical that processes are put in place to ensure that the demands of an organisation's operations are not a catalyst for employees to use mobile phones illegally or in an unsafe manner.

Having a well-planned policy in place can give structure and direction for organisations to support their employees to be safe on the roads.

What's the evidence and what's the risk to my employees?

There is a large body of road-safety research that shows mobile phones are one of many distractions that drivers may face on a daily basis.

With the help of driving simulator studies, research has shown that interacting with a mobile phone in different ways can impair driving performance (see Table 1).

Table 1 – using your mobile in a vehicle and how the risk changes

Activity	Decrements in driving performance
Writing a Facebook message	Slower speed, poorer lane control, longer glances off the forward roadway, 30% poorer reaction time to critical road events[1]
Reading a Facebook message	Slower speed, increased variability in headway, longer glances off the forward roadway[1]
Writing a text message	Increased reaction time to hazardous events, increased lateral variability, more missed traffic signals[5]
Text messaging via voice activation (vs. no texting)	Increased reaction time to hazardous road events[2], more time looking away from the forward roadway[3]
Talking/listening on a handheld or hands-free phone	Increased reaction time to road hazards[4]

1 – Basacik et al. (2011); 2 – Yager (2013); 3 – Owens et al. (2011); 4 – Caird et al. (2008); 5 – Caird et al. (2014)

A recent Naturalistic Driving Study (Dingus et al. 2016), undertaken by the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute (VTTI), closely analysed the everyday driving of 3,500 cars over three years and found that a range of in-vehicle activities could be associated with an increased crash risk (including mobile phone interactions).

Table 2 shows the relative crash risks for different activities as found by the study (**note:** odd ratios > 1.0 indicate increased crash risk; an odds ratio of 2.0 indicates a 2x increase in crash risk over non-distracted 'model driving'). It was concluded that the safest thing a driver could do was **keep their eyes on the road** because 'they are double their crash risk when their eyes are off the road for 2 seconds.

Table 2. Increase in risk of crash for distracting tasks

Risk activity undertaken by drivers	Risk (odds ratios)
Dancing in seat to music	1.0
Interaction with passenger	1.4
Eating	1.8
Talking on handheld phone	2.2
Vehicle climate control (e.g. adjusting air conditioning)	2.3
Texting on handheld (illegal) phone	6.1
Extended glances outside of car	7.1
Reaching for object	9.1
Emotion (anger, sadness, crying, and/or emotional agitation)	9.8
Reading/writing (includes tablet)	9.9
Dialling handheld (Illegal)	12.2
Drug/alcohol	35.9

The research indicated that 68.3% of crashes involved some type of observable distraction. Organisations should therefore strive to help employees understand the risk.

What does creating a policy involve?

The aim of a Safe Mobile Phone Use Policy is to help employees understand the risks of using mobile phones while driving and manage expectations around driving behaviour. It is important to implement a policy that is understood and adhered to because safety in the workplace is paramount and this extends to safety in the vehicle.

The complete guide can assist organisations to develop and implement a successful Safe Mobile Phone Use Policy. The key considerations when creating a policy are:

1. Baseline analysis – this involves an assessment of an organisation's culture in relation to mobile phone use while driving.

2. Training and education – this is an important component of implementing a policy, which can be supported by monitoring driving behaviour and analysing crash data (where possible).

3. Review of day-to-day work-related operations – the policy should be designed in a way that reduces the need for workers to use mobile phones while driving for business purposes.

What are the fundamentals of the Policy?

These principles are based on a common sense approach and are the recommended minimum level for a good practice and include:

1. Always keep your eyes on the road
2. Never text – its illegal and high risk
3. Buy, install and use a cradle for your phone
4. Use your smart phone and the car's features, such as Bluetooth and hands-free
5. Don't automatically answer your phone; consider the road and traffic conditions and do not engage in complex or emotional conversation whilst on a mobile
6. Ensure the caller knows you are driving
7. If you pull over for a call, ensure it is safe for you and other road users

The policy guide recognises that banning mobile phone use while driving is not always practical and could have unintended consequences. Bans may lead to driver behaviour with higher risk, e.g. drivers trying to hide their phone use in their lap, making them look down and away from the road rather than using a phone mount on the dash, which directs the eyes up and ahead.

Key considerations for developing a successful policy?

Consultation with leaders in industry demonstrated that there are several critical components to the successful implementation of a Safe Mobile Phone Use Policy.

These components include:

1. Establishment of a baseline
2. Leadership
3. Education
4. Training
5. Collection, Monitoring and Analysis of Critical Incident Data
6. Enforcement
7. Mobile Phone Design
8. Vehicle Purchase and Design

The Policy Guide explores each element in detail and provides a supporting survey and policy guide to assist in establishing a baseline and a policy template for organisations.

Making the policy your own

Every organisation and business is different. What does not change is the type of risks employees face when out on the road in a vehicle. Approaches may vary significantly.

The NRSPP is hoping that through this policy guide many organisations will seek to adopt the same approach to manage the associated risk of using mobile phones in vehicles. This will result in the same messages and risk awareness being promoted among employees and in the community and, thereby, reduce the risk.

For more information

To be kept informed on when the policy guide and supporting material will be available please go to www.nrspp.org.au and create an account.