



driver distraction and cellphone use

Driver distraction trends

More than 800 crashes occur every day in B.C., many of these caused by distracted driving.

Police statistics show that more than a quarter of all car crash fatalities in B.C. in the last five years (2011 to 2015) were related to distracted driving. That's an average of 78 deaths per year, making distracted driving the second-leading cause of motor vehicle fatalities in B.C., behind speeding (89) and narrowly ahead of impaired driving (66).

The B.C. government banned the use of personal electronic devices (including talking on a hand-held cellphone and text messaging) while driving as of January 1, 2010 and added tougher penalties that took effect June 1, 2016.

Tips for drivers

It can wait.

No call or text is so important it's worth risking your life. Let calls go to voicemail and ignore your text messages while driving.

Pull over to make or receive a call.

If you have to take a call, pull over if it's safe to do so or use your phone in hands-free mode; stay focused on the road and keep the conversation brief. Some highway rest areas now provide free Wi-Fi so you can safely pull over and stay connected.

Plan to avoid distraction.

Turn your cellphone off or place it in the trunk of your car so you won't be tempted to talk, email or text when you're on the road.

Keep your hands off.

Hands-free means a Bluetooth or wired headset or speakerphone. The device must be securely attached to the car—it can't be in your lap or loose on the seat beside you. If you're using a headset or headphones, remember that drivers can only wear them in one ear. Only motorcyclists may have an earpiece in both ears.

Make a commitment.

Pick up a decal at ICBC driver licensing offices or participating Autoplan broker offices to remind yourself and others on the road to leave the phone alone.

Tips for cyclists/pedestrians.

When you approach an intersection, pay attention to what's happening around you, avoid distractions and never assume drivers can see you. Remove your headphones and put away electronic devices so you can see, hear and respond safely to the unexpected and keep yourself safe.

Here are some other distracted driving tips:

- Check your route before departing. If you get lost, pull over to a safe and legal parking spot to program your GPS or read a map to avoid stress and distractions.
- Make sure your children are comfortable and properly secured in child restraint devices. If your child is crying or distressed, park safely before attending to their needs. Children are safest when you're focused on the road.
- Safely secure any pets in the car before you travel.
- Finish your grooming before heading out on the road. Don't rely on your driving time to shave, apply makeup or comb your hair.
- Stay calm. Don't engage in emotionally charged conversations while driving.
- Familiarize yourself with the equipment in your vehicle including all control switches, before you start driving so you can perform basic functions without taking your eyes off the road. This is especially important if you have a new or rental vehicle.

Note: Several tips above provided by the [Canada Safety Council](#).

FAQs about distracted driving

Can I call or text when I'm stopped at a red light?

The law applies whenever you're in control of the vehicle—even when you're stopped at a light or in bumper-to-bumper traffic. Studies show that drivers who are talking on a cellphone lose about 50 per cent of what is going on around them, visually. When you're stopped at an intersection or slowed in traffic, you're still driving.

If I'm a good driver, can I multi-task?

Drivers, even really good ones, need to concentrate on the road at all times because the unexpected—like when a pedestrian crosses the street without warning or cars quickly pass or merge—can happen at any time.

Is it okay to use some of the features on my phone while driving?

Under the law, drivers can't use any hand-held electronics while driving—that includes checking voice mail, making music selections, programming a GPS or using social media. In fact, you can't even hold the device in your hand while operating a vehicle. Ask a passenger to operate the device for you so you can keep your focus on the road.

Are emergency calls okay?

While the law exempts drivers needing to call 9-1-1 to reach the police, fire department or ambulance service about an emergency, it does not apply to personal situations—it has to be a real emergency. Your family and friends may have something urgent to tell you in a call or text, but your safety is always more important to them.

Are laws the same for all drivers?

While most drivers are allowed to use a hands-free device, drivers in the Graduated Licensing Program (GLP) are not. They have greater restrictions to help them stay focused on the road while they build their driving experience. This means no use of personal electronic devices at any time, including hands-free phones.

Is using the speakerphone allowed?

Not always. Under the law, drivers outside of the GLP are allowed to use hands-free cellphones and devices but there are restrictions on how.

In addition to a Bluetooth or wired headset, you can use the speakerphone if the phone is securely attached to either you (such as with a belt clip or in your pocket) or the car—you can't have it in your lap or loose on the seat beside you. Holding your phone in one hand and steering with the other isn't safe. And it's illegal. The best way to stay safe is to not use your phone at all.

B.C.'s mobile device law

According to section 214.2 of the [Motor Vehicle Act](#), a driver cannot operate a hand-held electronic device (including hand-held cellphones, smartphones, tablets and other electronic hand-held devices such as music players, GPS Navigation Systems, etc.). Also, a driver cannot communicate using text messages or email on any type of electronic device.

Drivers in the Graduated Licensing Program (GLP) are restricted from using hands-free cellphones while driving. Drivers with a regular licence are permitted to use hands-free cellphones and devices that can be operated with one touch or voice command, provided that the device is securely fixed to the vehicle or worn securely on the driver's body.

Any driver caught texting, emailing, holding a cellphone or other hand-held electronic device while driving will be fined \$368 and receive four driver penalty points (total \$543 minimum).

GLP drivers who receive one ticket will have their license reviewed by the Superintendent and may face driving prohibitions.

Fully licensed drivers who receive two tickets in a year will have their license reviewed by the Superintendent and face possible three to six months prohibition. In addition to the suspension, two tickets in one year will cost you \$1,256 (two fines at \$368 each, plus eight penalty points at \$520) and if you have points from other tickets (e.g. speeding), it will cost you even more.



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