

Direct Line Motor Insurance



The Mobile Phone Report

A report on the effects of using a 'hand-held' and
'hands-free' mobile phone on road safety

Published March 2002 by Direct Line Insurance





Welcome to the Direct Line Mobile
Phone Report on the effects of using a
hand-held and hands-free mobile phone.

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Foreword

By Janet Anderson
Member of Parliament for Rossendale & Darwen

There can be few of us who have not at some time witnessed someone at the wheel of a motor vehicle who is at the same time conducting a conversation on a hand-held mobile phone. The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA), estimate that 17 people have died on UK roads as a result of careless drivers using their mobile phones.

The real figure is no doubt much greater. It is only when someone is killed that the problems associated with mobile phones and driving are highlighted. As there is no specific offence related to using a mobile phone when driving, it is impossible to keep track of how often mobile phones are a factor in road traffic accidents.

Some may argue that our present laws are sufficient to deal with this problem. I believe that we know from our daily experiences that they are not. I now believe that it is right to consider a specific offence to cover the use of hand-held mobile phones when driving. On 14 November 2001, I introduced a parliamentary Bill to do exactly that.

I welcome the publication of this Direct Line report in setting the record straight. We must all recognise that driving and using mobile phones can kill. It takes less than a split second for a lapse in concentration to result in an accident. It must therefore be made crystal clear to drivers who insist on behaving in this way that they endanger the safety of the public generally, and their own safety too.

Janet Anderson MP

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Introduction

By **Dominic Burch**
Direct Line Road Safety Campaign Manager

Welcome to the Direct Line Mobile Phone Report, part of our ongoing commitment to raise awareness of issues that affect the UK's driving public. As Britain's largest direct motor insurer, with more than three million customers, Direct Line has consistently campaigned for continued improvements in road safety.

Over the previous thirty years the UK has led the way in road safety developments. The introduction of new measures like the use of safety cameras, the use of seatbelts and alcohol breathalyser testing, have given the UK one of the best road safety records in Europe. Direct Line believes that this enviable record could now be in danger.

This report contains new research commissioned by Direct Line to look at the issue of mobile phone use by drivers. Direct Line believes that this practice is responsible for an increasing number of accidents on UK roads. The findings demonstrate that the dangers are far greater than many had previously thought. This research, the first of its kind to be carried out in the UK, carries a serious health warning for all motorists: mobile phone users are as dangerous as drink-drivers.

Direct Line believes that there is now a clear need to examine this issue and push for a step change in driver behaviour. Nothing less than a change in the law with a new approach to policing and sentencing backed up with public awareness campaigns, can adequately drive this message home to help create a more secure environment for all road-users.

Dominic Burch
Direct Line Insurance





Summary of research

Direct Line commissioned the Transport Research Laboratory (TRL) to undertake extensive research on the dangers of using a mobile phone when driving. This study was designed to quantify the impairment from hands-free and hand-held mobile phone conversations in relation to the decline in driving performance caused by alcohol impairment.

Why Direct Line undertook this research

Previous research has shown that phone conversations while driving impair driving performance. However, it was difficult to quantify the risk of this impairment because the reference is usually made with regard to normal driving without using a phone. "Worse than normal driving" does not necessarily mean dangerous. We believed there was a need to benchmark driving performance while using a mobile phone against a clearly dangerous level of performance. Driving with a blood alcohol level over the legal limit is an established danger.

The sophisticated TRL Driving Simulator was used to provide a realistic driving task in a safe and controlled environment. Twenty healthy experienced drivers were tested on two separate occasions. The drivers were males and females aged 21 to 45 years. Each participant owned a mobile phone. Before starting the test drive, they consumed a drink, which either contained alcohol or a similar looking and tasting placebo drink. The quantity of alcohol was determined from the participant's age and body mass using the adjusted Widmark Formula (the UK legal alcohol limit 80mg/100ml).

The test drive included four road conditions:

- on a motorway with moderate traffic
- maintaining a safe distance when following another vehicle
- attempting to negotiate a bend in the road
- driving on a dual carriageway with traffic lights.

During each condition the drivers answered a standard set of questions and conversed with the experimenter over a mobile phone.

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Direct Line's key findings

The Direct Line research found that drivers' reaction times were significantly slower when using a mobile phone. As reaction times slow, the risk of collision and the severity of that collision will increase. This supports a previous study that showed that drivers who are engaged in a mobile phone conversation are four times as likely to crash than other drivers.¹ The Direct Line research showed a clear trend for significantly poorer driving performance (speed control, following distance and reaction times) when using a mobile phone in comparison to the other conditions.

- The best performance was by those drivers who were driving under normal conditions without the influence of alcohol or the distraction of a mobile phone.
- Driving performance under the influence of alcohol was significantly worse than normal driving, yet significantly better than driving while using a mobile phone. Furthermore, drivers reported that it was easier to drive drunk than to drive while using a phone.
- The results demonstrate that drivers' reaction times were, on average, 30% slower when talking on a hand-held mobile phone compared to being drunk and nearly 50% slower than under normal driving conditions. According to the tests, drivers were less able to maintain a constant speed and found it more difficult to keep a safe distance from the car in front.
- Using a hand-held mobile phone had the greatest impact on driving performance. On average it took hand-held mobile phone users half a second longer to react than normal, and a third of a second longer to react compared to when they were drunk. At 70 mph, this half-second difference is equivalent to travelling an additional 46 feet (14m) before reacting to a hazard on the road.





Distance travelled before response at 70mph



- In addition, drivers using either a hands-free or hand-held mobile phone significantly missed more road warning signs than when drunk.
- Hands-free was safer than using hand-held mobile phones. However, the conversation itself is a major distraction, with the use of hands-free phones carrying hidden dangers. As a result of this finding, even the use of hands-free proved more dangerous than driving under the influence of alcohol.

This study demonstrates beyond doubt that using a mobile phone when driving significantly impairs the driver's attention to potentially hazardous situations, more so than having a blood alcohol level at the UK legal limit (80mg/100ml).

In attempting to perform multiple tasks simultaneously, drivers subject themselves and other road-users to unacceptable dangers. This research for the first time uncovers just how great those dangers are and underlines the need for a change in the law.

The effects of mobile phone use

The principal hazard of phone use while driving is that it distracts the driver, taking their attention away from the task of driving. The driver's primary task is to monitor and control the vehicle's lateral and longitudinal position along a safe path. Distracted drivers may be dangerous when they are unable to adequately monitor and control the vehicle's safe path while using the phone.

The distraction caused by making or receiving a call can be visual, auditory, mental (cognitive) or physical (biomechanical). The use of mobile phones often involves more than one form of distraction at any one time. A hand-held mobile phone call for instance, could involve all four forms of distractions at the same time. Therefore, the consequences to road safety are much graver than current opinion suggests:

Physical and visual distraction

The physical effort in holding a telephone conversation is clear. Drivers will be frequently forced to take their hands off the steering wheel. There is also a significant visual distraction as drivers take their eyes off the road when making and receiving calls.

This is particularly pertinent given the development of new trends such as using mobile phones to send text messages, which involves the greatest degree of physical and visual distraction.

Conversations on hands-free mobile phones are less distracting than hand-held phones because there is less physical distraction. However, drivers who use hands-free phones are distracted from the task of driving in other ways.





Mental and auditory distraction

The Direct Line research provides strong evidence that there is a mental distraction while using a mobile phone, which takes the driver's mind off the road traffic environment. In attempting to concentrate on the phone call the driver is naturally distracted from their primary task, which is to remain in control of a moving vehicle. Rather than perform one task adequately, the driver is performing two tasks poorly giving rise to increased driver error.

Participants in this Direct Line study believed that the effects of talking on a mobile phone differ from those relating to having a conversation with a passenger or listening to the radio. A passenger in the car will allow the conversation to lapse enabling the driver to negotiate potential hazards as they arise. The passenger's body language is also important in alerting the driver's attention to road hazards. Somebody who isn't present, and is therefore unaware of those hazards, will continue to talk. The driver is therefore more likely to be distracted at crucial moments when accidents could occur.

Auditory distraction will occur in any conversation, including a phone call. However, the distraction is potentially greater on the phone as a result of the variations in sound quality, including temporary losses of mobile phone reception, which will occur during the course of the conversation.

Mobile phones vs. alcohol

The Direct Line research looked at a number of measures to assess the impact of mobile phone use in comparison to the effects of alcohol. These included the ability to keep in lane, to maintain vehicle speed, to maintain safe distance, and to react to critical events.

The research showed a clear trend for significantly poorer driving performance when using a phone in comparison to alcohol, with drivers who use mobile phones displaying a greater lack of judgement in the use of speed and an inability to recognise hazards on the road. Whilst drunk drivers seem to be worse at lateral control (i.e. maintaining lane position), it was clear

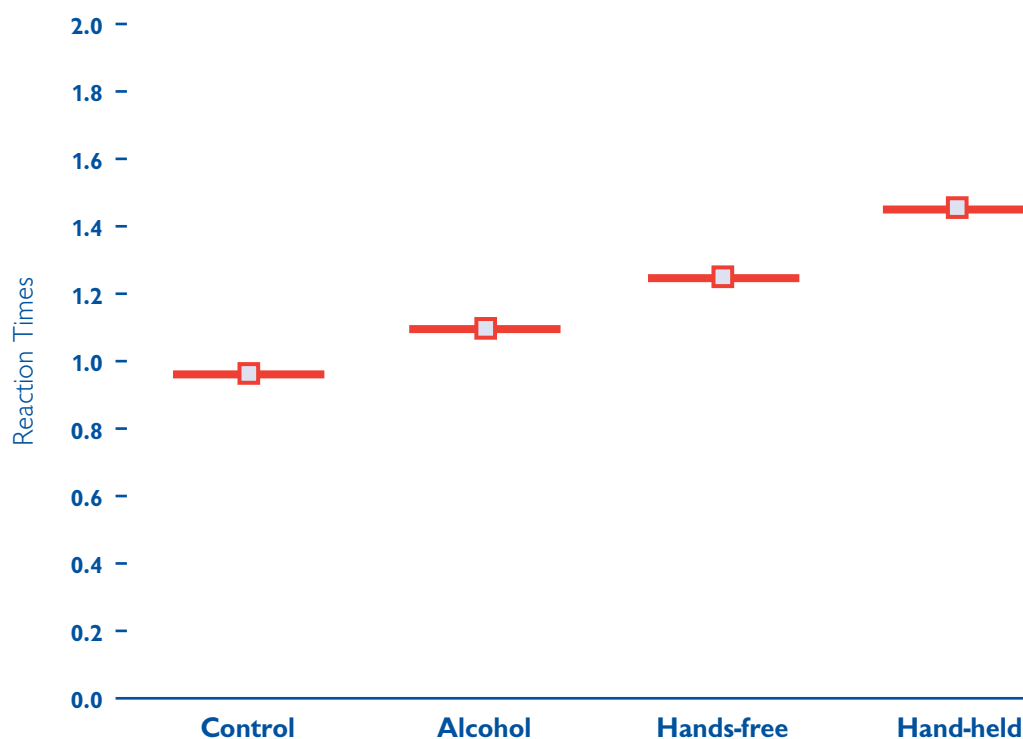
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that drivers distracted by mobile phones are much worse at longitudinal control (i.e. maintaining speed & maintaining distances with vehicles in front of them).

On all four road conditions, the drivers with hand-held mobile phones drove slower than those using hands-free phones or those driving under the influence of alcohol. The results showed that in terms of maintaining vehicle speed, those drivers holding conversations on hand-held phones performed much worse when compared to those driving under normal conditions. They also performed significantly worse in comparison to those driving under the influence of alcohol.

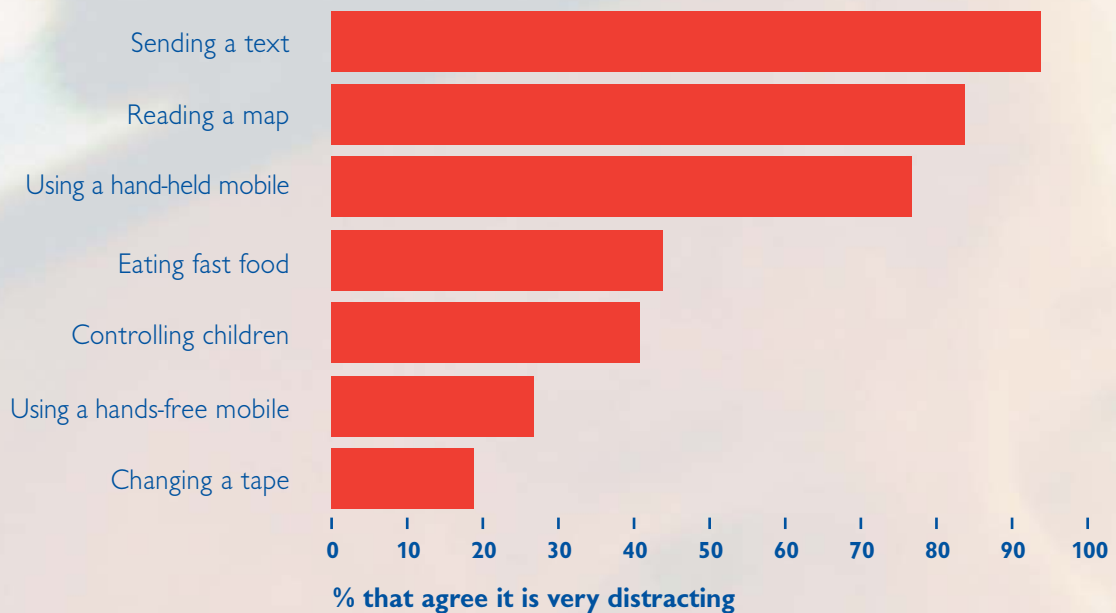
Reaction times were significantly slower for those using mobile phones when compared to those driving under the influence of alcohol. Drivers using hand-held phones were the slowest to react. Although driving performance under the influence of alcohol was significantly worse than normal driving, it was better than driving while using a phone. Drivers also reported that it was easier to drive drunk than to drive while using a phone, including the use of hands-free phones.





Mobile phones vs. other distractions

MORI survey of 2,000 drivers



A Direct Line MORI survey of 2,000 drivers, illustrated that driver impairment is greater when engaging in a mobile phone conversation, than that associated with merely listening to a radio or engaging in a relatively automatic task. The potential for mobile phones to distract a driver's attention is clearly greater than most other distractions.²

Sending a text message was considered to be the most distracting activity to perform while driving. This was followed closely by talking on a hand-held mobile phone or reading a map, which are both regarded as more distracting than using a hands-free phone. Activities such as eating and controlling children on the back seat were rated as being significantly less distracting than talking on a hand-held phone. Tuning a radio or changing a cassette tape was believed to be significantly less distracting than using a hand-held phone and reading a map, but comparable to talking on a hands-free phone.

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Hand-held vs. hands-free

The Direct Line research supported the common view that using a hand-held phone is more dangerous than using a hands-free phone. This is to be expected given the greater degree of physical distraction involved in making a hand-held phone call. It may surprise many to learn that the dangers surrounding the use of hands-free kits are much greater than previously imagined. The mental distraction involved in using such phones can create equally life-threatening situations on our roads. It is clear from the current perceptions in the Direct Line MORI findings that this danger is little understood. Mobile phones are very often sold with in-car kits to enable hands-free use, creating a false impression that this is somehow safer and therefore more acceptable.

Popular myths & opinions

The mobile revolution

The UK has experienced a huge growth in mobile phone ownership over the last decade. Around three quarters of the UK population now owns a mobile phone. The most recent research carried out for Ofcom (the Office of Telecommunications) by MORI, showed that amongst 2,063 UK adults surveyed, 73% claimed to personally own or use a mobile phone.³ This means that there are 44.7 million people who use a mobile phone.⁴ Additional research has revealed that a quarter of all mobile phone calls were made from a vehicle.⁵

This relatively recent phenomenon has had a huge impact on all our lives. Most of us would accept that this impact has been largely for the better. But how many of us have stopped to consider the impact on road safety? It would seem that for a large and growing minority of motorists the use of mobile phones while driving goes largely unquestioned.

A report by Direct Line on safe driving gives a startling figure for the number of people who use their mobile phone when driving. In a survey of 2,000 drivers, 31% admitted to using a hand-held mobile phone. This equates to a staggering 10 million people throughout the UK.





This figure rose higher still to over half of younger drivers (51%) and almost doubled for high mileage drivers.⁶ Meanwhile, as many as one in four young drivers use their mobile phones to send a text message, guaranteed to involve maximum physical distraction.

New technological dangers

The mobile phone is of course part of a wider technological revolution, which has seen a worrying increase in the number of in-car distractions.

While this Direct Line report focuses on the dangers of mobile phone use, policy makers should note the array of new technologies, such as in-vehicle telematics systems, all of which have the potential to cause similar distractions as those highlighted in this report regarding the use of mobile phones.

It is clear that new technologies will create new dangers as well as new opportunities. The legal framework must reflect all these developments in the wider interests of road safety.

The myths about mobiles

At present, a majority of motorists accept the dangers of hand-held phones. A MORI survey commissioned by Direct Line revealed that three quarters of drivers believed that talking on a hand-held mobile phone was very distracting. 87% said the use of hand-held mobile phones by drivers should be outlawed with 92% of drivers agreeing that people should pull over to a safe place before making or receiving a call in the car.⁷

However, in recent years a number of popular myths have developed amongst the growing minority of motorists who perceive the practice of making a call, or sending a text message when driving as 'safe' and therefore socially acceptable.

Many people believe that a 'quick call' doesn't matter – that it won't impact on safety. Or that it is the physical act of holding a phone that makes using a mobile phone unsafe, not the

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conversation itself, leading many to conclude that the use of 'hands-free' phones provides the motorist with a safe option. It is significant that only 27% of drivers thought that using hands-free phones was very distracting.⁸

Another common myth is that all distractions are equally dangerous. Using a mobile phone is viewed as being similar to listening to a radio and no more distracting than talking to a passenger. Or that the distraction caused by using a mobile phone ends when the call ends.

These myths have developed despite a growing body of scientific evidence, backed up by the findings in this report, which clearly state the dangers. Direct Line believes that these dangers are grossly under-exposed in the media to date. According to RoSPA, 17 people have been killed on Britain's roads in accidents involving mobile phones, with many more deaths and serious injuries wrongly attributed to other causes through inadequate methods of road accident investigation.

The current legal position

The use of a hand-held mobile phone whilst driving is not an official offence.

However, where the use of a mobile phone prevents the driver from exercising "full control of the vehicle at all times" the driver can be prosecuted under Regulation 104 of the Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986. This carries a maximum fine of £2,500. The police can also prosecute drivers for "careless driving" under section 3 of the Road Traffic Act 1988.

Section 3 of the 1988 Act, amended under the Road Traffic Act 1991, allows for prosecutions where drivers who are using a mobile phone cause death by dangerous driving. Equally, it can be an offence for an employer to require employees to use a mobile phone while driving.

The Highway Code⁹ advises drivers never to use a hand-held mobile phone or microphone when driving. The Highway Code also advises drivers to find a safe place to stop first, cautioning that





the use of hands-free equipment is also likely to distract a driver's attention from the road.

Penalties and prosecutions for driving whilst using a mobile phone range from a possible penalty of 2 years imprisonment for dangerous driving. Offenders also risk an unlimited fine, disqualification and an extended re-test. For careless driving there is a maximum fine of £2,500. Offenders may gain 3-9 points on their driving licence and a discretionary disqualification in extreme cases. Where mobile phone use causes death by dangerous driving, the maximum penalty is imprisonment and a disqualification of at least two years.

However, the law is generally applied only in the event of an accident. Even where an accident has occurred, the police often fail to assess whether a mobile phone was being used at the time of the accident, and if that is found to be the case, magistrates fail to apply the full force of the law.

CASE STUDY A

Lee Searles received 240 hours community service and a two-year ban for killing Shelley Cooper, and paralysing Rebecca Foster when he ploughed into their car whilst calling his wife on his mobile phone. He now says using mobile phones should be banned.

CASE STUDY B

Rebekka Hudd from Bristol was killed in September 1996. The driver who killed her was calling his girlfriend on his mobile phone. The driver received a £250 fine and 6 penalty points for driving without due care and attention. The victim's mother Lynda Hudd expressed her disgust with the trial outcome. She feels that the sentence would have been "no different if the driver had hit a fence post".

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Direct Line call to action

Direct Line is campaigning for a change in the law on hand-held mobile phone use

There is now a growing consensus on the need for change. Road safety organisations, politicians and magistrates have all supported Direct Line's demands. More recently, the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) has signalled that a change in the law may now be necessary.

Furthermore, a change in the law would bring the UK into line with other European Union countries. In Italy the Road Code, which entered into law in 1993, prohibits the use of all hand-held radio-telephonic devices and headphones. Spain has also recently undergone a debate on the issue of mobile phone use by motorists. The Spanish Government amended existing laws to take into account the dangers of mobile phone use.

From April 2001 drivers in Germany were banned from using a hand-held mobile phone. The law applies even if the vehicle is stationary in a traffic jam, with offenders facing a fixed penalty fine. Portugal has also established laws against using a mobile phone while driving, basing their decision on public opinion and driver-simulation studies, similar to those of the TRL. Laws on the use of mobile phones while driving are now in place in at least 23 countries.

Direct Line is also calling on the Government to launch a wider public debate on the dangers of hands-free mobile phone use

Direct Line would like to see greater understanding of the impact of hands-free mobile phone use on driving and road safety. Any change in the law should be supported with a public education campaign highlighting the potential dangers of hands-free mobile phone usage whilst driving.

The shock tactics employed by the government to alert UK drivers to the dangers of drink driving have been highly effective. Direct Line advocates a similar campaign for mobile phone usage.





Who can take action?

- i Employers can send a strong message that safety comes first. Company policies must reduce the pressure on employees to use mobiles when driving on company business.
- ii The Government has a clear role to play in providing the necessary legal framework, which adequately reflects the inherent dangers of mobile phone use as a growing source of driver distraction. Government strategies on road safety must also give greater recognition to mobile phone use.
- iii The police and magistrates have a role to play in sending a strong deterrent to drivers through adequate enforcement and sentencing.
- iv Most importantly, drivers must change their behaviour. Direct Line believes that a new legal framework supported by public awareness campaigns would make the greatest impression on the motoring public.

1 Responsible employers - action by Direct Line

Research has revealed that mobile phone conversations while driving are much more likely to be business-related. This is reflected in new Direct Line MORI research that suggested that company car drivers are the worst offenders.¹⁰ High mileage drivers (those who drive 40,000 miles per year or more, which consists largely of commercial drivers) are more than twice as likely as the average driver to use a mobile phone at the wheel with 78% of high mileage drivers admitting to do this at some point.¹¹

The pressures on employees to make calls either to clients or colleagues, is increasingly likely to result in drivers compromising not only their own safety, but also that of other road users.

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Direct Line 'Drive Safely' policy – putting safety first

Direct Line company policy recognises the dangers contained in this report. The Direct Line Group operates a policy to provide managers and staff with guidance on the health and safety issues associated with mobile phones used during company business. The policy is designed to protect the safety of all our employees, advising Direct Line staff that to “drive safely they must concentrate at all times, keeping their mobile phones switched off when driving”.¹²

The Direct Line 'Drive Safely' policy is designed around the need to protect our employees by putting road safety first. The policy states:

- “Although you may think that a hands-free phone allows you to keep in control of your vehicle your mind may not be fully on driving. It is not like talking to a passenger who will be more aware of traffic conditions and can see what is happening while you are driving”
- “Talking on the phone distracts your attention from the road and can lead to an accident. Never use a mobile phone while driving – you are not in full control of your car if you are holding a mobile phone. Even using a hands-free phone is distracting”

Direct Line strongly believes that all employers have a responsibility to offer clear instruction to their staff not to use hand-held or hands-free phones when using company vehicles.

Direct Line Mobile Phone Campaign – raising awareness and calling for change

Direct Line is now campaigning to change the law. Having commissioned in-depth research from TRL we are now in no doubt that the dangers are clear. That is why Direct Line is supporting Janet Anderson, the Member of Parliament for Rossendale and Darwen, who recently introduced a Bill in Parliament.

Janet Anderson's Bill reflects Direct Line's concerns in calling for an outright ban on the use of





all hand-held mobile phones when driving. The Bill calls for a range of new penalties, which would bring the new offence into line with other established road safety dangers such as speeding offences.

We are calling on the Government and the police to take the findings of this Direct Line report seriously. Though the dangers are greatly underestimated, Direct Line believes that the number of deaths and serious injuries on the UK's roads resulting from mobile phone use, merits government action.

2 The Government

The Government has a duty to ensure safer roads for all road-users. It is crucial that policy develops adequately to reflect the ever-changing dangers on our roads. The dangers of mobile phones were recognised in May 1999 with the introduction of a Bill in the House of Lords, which called for a new law covering the use of mobile phones by motorists. Lord Davies, who introduced the Bill, argued, that “a specific offence would make it clear to drivers that it is wrong” and that “there seems to be some confusion among motorists at present about where they stand legally”.¹³

The Government's Road Safety Strategy

Despite this, the Government's Road Safety Strategy published in March 2000 claimed that there was still no need for change. The Road Safety Strategy sets targets for substantial improvements in road safety over the next ten years. This includes a 40% reduction in the number of people killed or seriously injured in road accidents by 2010.¹⁴ At the launch, the Prime Minister Tony Blair, called for everyone to make road safety a priority and bring to an end the needless toll of injuries and deaths on our roads.¹⁵

The Government's strategy states “to drive safely we need to be physically and mentally alert. Drink, drugs and tiredness contribute to driving accidents”.¹⁶ This Direct Line report clearly

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demonstrates that using a mobile phone is also a dangerous factor, which can greatly reduce both the physical and mental alertness of drivers.

DIRECT LINE CALLS ON THE GOVERNMENT

To give greater recognition to the dangers of mobile phone use by motorists as part of its current road safety strategy. The failure to do so could seriously undermine the Government's long-term objective of reducing deaths and serious injuries on UK roads.

The Government's view on mobile phone use

Despite the UK Government's current view that a change in the law is not necessary, it has none-the-less determined that the use of a mobile phone whilst driving is not compatible with maintaining the full control of your vehicle. This has been reflected in the changes introduced by the Government to the guidance given to drivers in the Highway Code. A number of public awareness campaigns on mobile phone use have also sought to highlight the dangers amongst motorists.

However, without a change in the law, the new guidance and awareness campaigns have made little impression on driver behaviour. The Government paper 'Tomorrow's Roads – safer for everyone' makes a promise to review the need for fresh legislation where it will assist in reducing road deaths. Direct Line believes that review is now overdue.

The Road Traffic Act 1988 has failed to provide the necessary signals to a large minority of the motoring public as to the severe consequences of mobile phone use. It is time for the Government to send a new, clearer message to all drivers - mobile phones are a potentially lethal distraction.





DIRECT LINE CALLS ON THE GOVERNMENT

To introduce new legislation making it an offence to drive when using a hand-held mobile phone. This would give police new powers to stop drivers who are caught using their mobile phones when driving. This offence would carry a fixed penalty of up to 3 penalty points and a £60 fine, bringing the use of mobile phones into line with other traffic offences such as speeding.

3 The Police and Magistrates

Enforcement and sentencing are vital elements in helping to change attitudes and behaviour amongst drivers. Direct Line welcomes the line taken by the Magistrates' Association (MA), which has pressed for the introduction of a new law similar to that advocated in this report.

In July 2001 Arthur Winnington, the chairman of the MA's road traffic committee, supported the need for a dedicated offence and penalty to emphasise the seriousness of the problem.

The MA suggested a fixed penalty of a £60 fine and three penalty points.

However, the police have proved to be less supportive. One of the major reasons cited by the Government for its refusal to take action, is the belief held by Britain's senior police officers that the current legislation is adequate. The Association of Chief Police Officer's (ACPO) argues for improved road user behaviour "with driver error contributing to over 95 per cent of all collisions, improving road user behaviour must be the key priority. Lapses in concentration, errors in judgement and in particular violations (crimes) contribute to increased risks, collisions and casualties".¹⁷

However, ACPO's National Road Policing Strategy (NRPS) does not mention the need to deal

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more effectively with problems relating to mobile phone use. In mirroring the Government's strategy, ACPO's approach seems to undermine its own priority "to secure an environment where the individual can use the roads with confidence, free from death, injury, damage or fear".¹⁸

DIRECT LINE CALLS ON THE POLICE AND MAGISTRATES

To adopt a more strict approach to policing and sentencing motorists who make use of mobile phones. This would be wholly consistent with the stated objectives of the police and the MA. As part of this stricter approach Direct Line would like to see ACPO amend the NRPS' operational priorities as part of the Strategy's annual review process.

A new approach to accident investigations

Even without a change in the law, Direct Line believes that the police have a vital role to play in driving home a more serious message to motorists. In any road traffic accident the police may list up to four contributory factors in determining the cause of a crash. This may include for example speeding, alcohol or drug use.

However, the current STATS 19 form, which is used by the police to record crash data, does not list mobile phones as a causal factor. As a result, it is clear that many police officers still do not consider the use of mobile phones as a significant danger. The failure to investigate mobile phone use ensures that there is widespread under-reporting of the issue; supporting the myth held by some motorists that this is not a problem.

The lack of good quality crash data in the UK has been identified by many as a key problem. Direct Line recognises the pressing need for changes in the way the police currently investigate and report the causes of accidents to help develop an accurate assessment of the true scale of the problem.





DIRECT LINE CALLS ON THE POLICE

To review the STATS 19 form to include a reference to mobile phone use in those circumstances where an accident has occurred. By attaching greater importance to the dangers of mobile phone use by accident investigators, the greater the long-term impact will be on the driver's assessment of those dangers, encouraging a change in driver behaviour and improving road safety.

What must happen next?

The case for taking action has been made. This report demonstrates that the use of hand-held mobile phones presents as many dangers as driving under the influence of alcohol. The Government, the police and magistrates have been taking the threat of alcohol seriously for years.

However, Direct Line would like to see the tough approach adopted in fighting more commonly understood and well-established dangers such as drink driving, extended to the campaign against the use of hand-held mobile phones by motorists. We now believe that this approach requires nothing less than a change in the law.

Many drivers would accept the need for a change on the law on the use of hand-held mobile phones. The danger of physical distractions caused by hand-held phones, unlike the use of hands-free phones, means that this change is now desperately overdue.

After the law has changed...

Once the UK has introduced an effective legal framework, we should ensure that it is effectively enforced and supported with the development of new advertising and publicity campaigns, which raise driver awareness of the change in the law, and of the genuine road safety concerns driving that change.

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Awareness campaigns will be an important part of the solution. Direct Line is concerned that the Government's Road Safety Strategy in setting its key priorities for future publicity campaigns as "speed; child road safety; drink driving; and driver fatigue" may allow this important policy area to slip through the net.

And what about hands-free...

The mental distraction of making any phone call when driving, clearly demonstrates the latent dangers of using hand-free phones. This report establishes that the impact of using a hands-free mobile phone is more dangerous when compared to the influence of an established danger such as drink driving.

Direct Line believes that this justifies the need for further Government research on the issue of hands-free, and calls on the Government to initiate a wider debate examining the growing dangers of all in-car technologies.





Footnotes

- | | | |
|-----------|--|-----------------------|
| 1 | Redelmeier & Tibshirani, New England Journal of Medicine | 1997 |
| 2 | Direct Line MORI research | November 2001 |
| 3 | MORI survey | August 2001 |
| 4 | Baskerville Strategic Research | 2001 |
| 5 | Ipsos-RSL research published by Oftel | September 1999 |
| 6 | Direct Line MORI research | July 2001 |
| 7 | Direct Line MORI research | November 2001 |
| 8 | Direct Line MORI research | November 2001 |
| 9 | The Highway Code, Section 117 | |
| 10 | Direct Line MORI research | July 2001 |
| 11 | Direct Line MORI research | July 2001 |
| 12 | Direct Line health and safety policy | 2002 |
| 13 | ROSPA press release | May 1999 |
| 14 | DTLR, Road Safety Strategy | March 2000 |
| 15 | DTLR, press release | March 2000 |
| 16 | DTLR, Road Safety Strategy | March 2000 |
| 17 | ACPO National Road Policing Strategy | 2002 |
| 18 | ACPO National Road Policing Strategy | 2002 |

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