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Hands-free cell phones only is a good plan

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Banning the use of hand held cell phones while driving a vehicle is a good idea. I do feel uncomfortable adding support to yet another law in our multi-layered labyrinth of laws, but this one is about road safety, plain and simple.

The cell phone is an integral part of my driving experience, and yes I have used the hand-held variety. Not any more, not unless there is an emergency and hand-held is the only option.

One day I sat and had a think about it, and I had to admit to myself that somewhere between 20-40% of the attention I use to watch the road is soaked up by the phone when I am holding it to my ear. It was really quite frightening when I owned up to myself about it. How many accidents might there have been had fate not been kind to me and kept trouble out of the way while I worked my way down the road in my blissful cell phone cloud?

It isn't just eyes not on the job that is the problem. There is the matter of one hand, both of which should be on the wheel, being completely absorbed in managing the phone. I need that hand to drive the car! This is my life at stake here. Why am I allowing my safety, and everyone else's to be compromised?

As I realized how much I was affected, I found myself watching others driving, and it wasn't long before drivers, whom I saw had phones glued to their ears, went high on my list of those whom I want to avoid. Give these folks lots of distance because they are just not all present.

Drunks are my biggest concern on the road, especially the ones that are weaving about and losing control. These folks are deadly dangerous. Cell phone users are next on my list. The good news is that they are sober and can snap back to attention quickly, but the bad news is that they cannot be counted upon to be responsible drivers while on the phone.

And then there are the accident reports. There was the young woman, with two of her friends in the car, who made a U-turn head-on into a truck. The kids all died. Police reported that she was using her cell phone at the time. There is a long list of these tragic stories, and surely these should give one pause to consider the danger of hand-held phones.

So I started looking at hands-free options. I certainly was not impressed with the quality of wired ear-pieces being sold. I tried half a dozen different types and styles and they were all inadequate. I could not regulate the sound, or hear properly, or be heard properly, and ultimately, with all of them, they broke. The wires just came apart. It was suspicious that this usually happened just after the warranties expired.



However, I did find that when I was operating with the headset the amount of energy absorbed by talking on the phone was reduced almost to the point of being negligible. So it was worth it to me to keep looking. Now I am using a Bluetooth and things are so close to perfect that the flaws count for naught. There is a blue light that wants to alert the whole world that I am talking to someone. A piece of black electrician's tape handled that. It can be a tortuous process to learn how to turn the thing on and off. But I did that and now it's simple enough. And I'm sure to roll the window up before talking. Little tricks of the trade.

Now when I drive down the road and someone calls, the phone answers automatically, we talk and then when the conversation is over, the other person hangs up and my phone disconnects. I can disconnect quickly just by a light press to the button on the ear-piece. I can also redial the last number I called by pressing that same button a little longer. Except for pushing that button, all the while I have both hands on the wheel and both eyes on the road. Perhaps there is some attention lost to the conversation but in my experience it is almost inconsequential. It's right up there with what it costs

me to listen to the Vinyl Café on the CBC, and I am NOT going to turn off the Vinyl Café. I picked that program because you need to listen to get it, just like a phone conversation.

I have found that with a good working ear-piece I can listen and participate and if anything it will all serve to contribute to my driving. Good conversation tends to wake me up out of my boredom and actually increases my attention to what's happening, starting with the road.

So now I have my cake and am eating it too. Hands-free.

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