

# National Safety Council Calls for Nationwide Ban on Cell Phone Use While Driving

*Bold Plan Seeks to Involve Law Makers, Businesses and Public*

Itasca, Ill. – The National Safety Council today is calling on motorists to stop using cell phones and messaging devices while driving, and is urging businesses to enact policies prohibiting it and governors and legislators in all 50 states and the District of Columbia to pass laws banning the behavior.

“Studies show that driving while talking on a cell phone is extremely dangerous and puts drivers at a four times greater risk of a crash,” said Janet Froetscher, president and CEO of the NSC. “Driving drunk is also dangerous and against the law. When our friends have been drinking, we take the car keys away. It’s time to take the cell phone away.”

A study from the Harvard Center of Risk Analysis estimates that cell phone use while driving contributes to 6 percent of crashes, which equates to 636,000 crashes, 330,000 injuries, 12,000 serious injuries and 2,600 deaths each year. The study also put the annual financial toll of cell phone-related crashes at \$43 billion.

Talking on a cell phone may be less distracting than some other activities people may engage in while driving, but the use of cell phones and texting devices is much more pervasive, making it more dangerous overall, Froetscher said. The NSC also points to studies from researchers at the University of Utah that show that hands-free devices do not make cell phone calls while driving safe. Another study demonstrates that talking to passengers, as opposed to talking on a cell phone, actually makes adult drivers safer, because passengers help alert drivers to potential driving risks.

“When you’re on a call, even if both hands are on the wheel, your head is in the call, and not on your driving,” Froetscher said. “Unlike the passenger sitting next to you, the person on the other end of the call is oblivious to your driving conditions. The passenger provides another pair of eyes on the road.”

A significant amount of vehicular cell phone use is done on the job. Many businesses have already acknowledged the injuries and costs associated with this behavior by adopting policies that ban cell phone use by employees on the roads. Among NSC member businesses that responded to a survey, 45 percent said they have company policies prohibiting on-road cell phone use. Of those, 85 percent said the policies make no difference in business productivity.

“Anyone with a busy job knows the temptation to multi-task and stay in touch with the office while driving,” Froetscher said. “Believe me, I’ve been there. I didn’t realize how much risk I was taking. Most people don’t. Employers understand how dangerous the behavior is and their potential liability. We are asking all businesses to join us by adopting policies banning calling and texting while driving on the job.”

Froetscher is sending letters this week to all governors and state legislative leaders, encouraging them to adopt statewide bans. She acknowledged that achieving and enforcing bans in all states will be a challenge, but she said the NSC has successfully faced similar challenges in the past, such as seatbelt enforcement.

“It may be hard for some people to imagine how certain laws, such as those concerning drunk driving, teen driving, seatbelt use and booster seats, can be enforced by observation alone,” Froetscher said. “Smart people in law enforcement get together to address such issues. They develop creative and successful measures to identify violators, such as high-visibility enforcement strategies.”

The NSC will take a three-fold approach to leading change: advocating legislation; educating the public and businesses about the risk of cell phone use while driving; and supplementing distracted driving content in its training of 1.5 million people annually in defensive driving.

“The change we are looking for, to stop cell phone use while driving, won’t happen overnight. There will be a day, however, when we look back and wonder how we could have been so reckless with our cell phones and texting devices,” Froetscher said.