



Cell Phone Use Is A Driving Hazard

Written On July 28, 2009 By [Bob Kraft](#)

I've written about cell phones and driving many times here (for instance [Just Hang Up and Drive!](#)), so this falls into the "What's New?" category, but many of us forget just how dangerous it can be to drive while talking on a cell phone. The [Philadelphia Inquirer](#) summed it up so well in an editorial that I'm going to take the liberty of repeating it here. Please, don't talk and drive if you can avoid it.

The device most motorists first knew as a "car phone" is wreaking havoc on the nation's highways – where a person yakking on a cell phone behind the wheel is just as dangerous as a drunken driver.

Deep in conversation, many motorists are unaware as they blow through red lights and swerve across traffic lanes. Government officials, public health experts, and the driving public should be alarmed by the dangers.

But instead, federal officials since 2003 have suppressed reams of data on the highway risks of cell phones. That may explain why the nation lags so far behind in regulating this deadly driving hazard.

In a climate of *don't tell, can't ask*, neither citizens nor policy-makers can be expected to make informed decisions on cell-phone risks.

Two consumer groups, the Center for Auto Safety and Public Citizen, unearthed evidence that the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) withheld "hundreds of pages of research and warnings about the use of phones by drivers," the New York Times first reported.

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The highway agency also decided not to pursue its own researchers' recommendation for a massive study to nail down the risks.

It's no surprise the bureaucrats' chief fear was that a cell-phone safety warning would anger the Republican-led Congress, triggering funding cuts. Under then-President George W. Bush, regulation of all types was out of vogue.

The price for that inaction, however, was paid by motorists and bystanders killed and injured in thousands of accidents attributed to drivers distracted by phones and other devices. Not to mention the higher insurance premiums passed on to all drivers to cover the cost of the wrecks.

Any other safety hazard so clearly identified as the cause of 2,600 annual traffic deaths and 330,000 accidents would have triggered demands for regulation. But just a few states, including New Jersey, ban hand-held phones in favor of hands-free devices. Even fewer states are considering a ban on the more scary practice of drivers texting.

Since recent research has revealed that dialing drivers are four times as likely to crash, the federally chartered National Safety Council rightly called for a ban on motorist calls.

That may be an uphill battle with drivers so attached to these gadgets amid constant industry sales pitches. But NHTSA finally could alter those views with a concerted safety push.

Just as motorists were persuaded to embrace seat belts, they can be won over in preventing the dangers of driving while distracted by a "car phone."