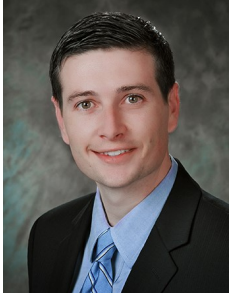


You Can Live Without Your Cell Phone

By: John MacLeod

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Perhaps you have seen an electronic highway message board reminder regarding the new 2017 driver cell phone law. Some message boards on California highways read, “Handheld cell against the law and dangerous.”

Essentially, under the new law, every driver is prohibited from using a cell phone while holding it and driving. This prohibits talking and texting, as well as all other uses, such as GPS directions, social media, checking email, internet searches, taking photos, watching videos, etc.

It is obvious that fumbling with your phone while driving instead of focusing on the road is dangerous for you and your passengers, but also nearby drivers, motorcyclists, cyclists, and pedestrians. But how dangerous?

The Department of Transportation reports that in 2014 there were 3,179 people killed and 431,000 injured nationwide in crashes involving distracted drivers. Up to 80 percent of vehicle crashes involve some sort of driver inattention, talking and texting is the number one source of driver distractions, and at any one time up to 10 percent of drivers may be using a mobile device, according to the California Office of Traffic Safety.

Text messaging makes a crash 23 times more likely, based on a study by the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute. And cell phone use is estimated to be involved in 26 percent of all crashes, according to a National Safety Council report. Oh, and smartphone ownership is on the rise.

The point is that a person’s pressing need to stream Justin Bieber or answer a text from a bestie is easily outweighed by the significant risk of death and dismemberment. That got dark—but this is serious.

Seeing incidents of cell phone-related bad driving seems almost commonplace nowadays. When you see a driver veering out of his lane or oddly changing speeds, your first thought is “he’s probably on his cell phone.”

Without a doubt, it has become irritating to witness drivers on their phone. The smartphone addiction is understandable. But giving in to the addiction is simply not worth the risk. It is not even close. You don’t want to be the victim of a distracted driver, and you don’t want to be that driver. All of us need to exercise the will power to ignore the phone while you are driving. You might find you actually enjoy the drive more and the freedom from your devices.

It is worth noting that, according to the California Office of Traffic Safety after fees and penalty assessments are added to the base fines, a ticket will actually cost at least \$160 for the first offense and \$285 for a subsequent offense. And if you answer that text and kill someone while doing so, you are likely to be convicted of a felony and spend some time in prison.