

Bases Ban Hand-He

Photo courtesy AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety



regulations aboard some bases. Specifically, the officials are banning hand-held cell phones from use while driving on base. Motorists either must have a hands-free device or park off the roadway to use their hand-held devices. Violations draw different penalties, depending on where they occur.

On July 1, 2004 (with a 31-day grace period), violators at all Naval District Washington (NDW) installations became subject to a \$100 fine

An E-2 was typing a test message on his cell phone while driving, crossed a median, and hit a large tree head-on. Among his injuries were a broken right ankle, broken right femur, broken pelvis, broken left hip, and multiple lacerations to his face and spleen. He wasn't wearing a seat belt. At last report, he still was hospitalized, and no one knew how many lost workdays he would have.

Elsewhere, an E-1 answered his cell phone after entering the front gate of a naval station, en route to his ship for duty. The subsequent loss of situational awareness caused him to hit a light pole 1,000 yards from the entrance. The young victim suffered only a minor knee injury.

Finally, an E-5 was driving northbound on an interstate highway when she tried to retrieve a cell phone from her pants pocket to answer an incoming call. As if that distraction wasn't enough, she had a BAC of 0.08. She ended up hitting a concrete median and requiring surgery to repair four ruptured cervical disks.

Incidents like these have caused Navy and Marine Corps officials to start changing driving

and a one-point penalty on their driving record for each infringement. The only exceptions are drivers caught using a hand-held phone for making an emergency call, dialing a phone number, or powering the phone on or off.

At Quantico Marine Corps Base, on the other hand, where warnings went into effect in May 2003, but enforcement didn't occur until July 1, 2004, violators are assessed a three-point penalty on their driving records for each infringement. Those who accrue 12 points in a year will find themselves walking or cycling across the 60,000-acre Quantico installation.

And, at Marine Corps Air Station, Iwakuni, Japan, violators receive a warning on the first offense and a three-point ticket for all subsequent violations. Base motorists who accrue 12 points in 12 months or 18 points in 24 months have their license revoked.

Both military and civilian personnel Marine Corpswide already are forbidden by MCO 5100.19E to use hand-held cell phones on base. Most Navy commands, however, won't be affected until the new OpNavInst 5100.12H is issued—at a

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date yet to be determined. [*OpNavInst 5100.12G simply says to exercise caution while operating cellular phones in a moving motor vehicle.*]

Advocates calling for such bans on cell-phone use in cars point to research, like the University of Utah's "inattention blindness" findings to support their case. In 2001, university researchers found that drivers were slower to react and more likely to be involved in an accident when talking on a cell phone. Their research also found that hands-free devices did not significantly reduce the risk factors.

"Inattention blindness" is said to impair a driver's ability to process visual information. The researchers concluded that, even if drivers are looking directly at objects, they might not be able to see them because their attention is directed somewhere else—namely, the phone conversation.

An earlier Japanese study of 50 students reflected obvious findings: They tended to drift into

other lanes while dialing and answering or talking on cell phones. However, the research also revealed some hidden problems.

The students took an average 1.9 seconds to pick up a cell phone, compared to just 1.05 seconds to turn on the radio or to switch stations. Meanwhile, the average braking time of slightly more than one second increased more than 50 percent when the students were holding a car phone. The research also revealed that the drivers tended to do more braking while using a phone.

With the new Navy and Marine Corps rules for using cell phones while driving on base, retailers are likely to have at least a few more customers looking for devices that help them meet the required hands-free operation. What's available?

Small earphones that insert into the ear and that have microphones are growing in popularity. Speakerphones that can dial a number, using only

voice, also are becoming more prevalent. These latter devices mount in a car's interior and can pick up the driver's voice without any need for manual manipulation.

According to the Cellular Telecommunications Industry Association, there are 100 million wireless subscribers today, which is more than 36 percent of the U.S. population. Of those subscribers driving passenger cars on America's roadways at any given time, three percent are talking on hand-held cell phones. That's the results of a survey conducted by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. ■



The owner of this car was on his way to work when a young woman in the next lane started moving toward him. He honked his horn, but she just kept coming. It turns out she was late for work, talking on her cell phone, and never heard the horn.