

Cellphone debate continues: readers share diverse opinions

Common-sense phone-use habits can help keep driving “multi-taskers” and others safer on the roads

Last week we opened up the floor to your comments, thoughts, and opinions on cellphones, and how (or if) they affect drivers. Predictably, as we discussed in the column, there were arguments on both sides.

Several small business owners and contractors pointed out that cellphones literally were the lifelines of their businesses. They felt the threat of an actual ban of cellphone use while driving could dramatically impact their livelihood. One gentleman stated that a good driver is a good driver, no matter what the “distraction” (passenger, radio or cellphone), and that to automatically label drivers on cellphones as menaces to society was patently unfair.

Others wrote in to say that if they had to pull over every time the phone rang, they could actually present more of a hazard since they’d be concentrating on driving, talking and



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looking for a place to pull over. Why add to the distractions already presented by talking and driving by complicating the process?

Some commented that they had never really thought about the cellphone/passenger distraction comparison, and while they hadn’t changed their minds about cellphones (all were against their use in vehicles) they did appreciate that a passenger can be an equal, if not greater, distraction than a cellphone. As any parent or car-sick dog owner can attest.

Nix cells for novices?

Another suggested that new drivers should be restricted from using their

cellphones while they’re on the road. She felt they simply didn’t have the driving experience to successfully chat and drive at the same time.

Thanks for your opinions. Whatever side you’re on, it’s obvious that cellphones are not going away. And as there is no legislation in the works in Manitoba or Canada to ban their use on the roads, the key is to figure out how to use them safely.

Here are a few tips to help make this latest societal “multi-task” a safer one.

- Safe driving is your first priority. A ringing phone isn’t. Always buckle up, keep your hands on the wheel and your eyes on the road.
- Make sure that your phone is positioned where it is easy to see and reach.
- Be familiar with how your phone works, so that you’re comfortable using it on the road. Get a hands-free model, if you can.

- Make sure your phone is dealer-installed to get the best possible sound quality.
- Actually read the manual, figure out how to use the speed dial feature, and program in frequently called numbers. Then you can make a call by touching only two or three buttons.
- When dialing manually without the speed-dialing feature, dial only when stopped. If you can’t stop or pull over, dial a few digits, then survey traffic before completing the call. (Better yet, have a passenger dial).
- Let your wireless network’s voice mail pick up your calls when it’s inconvenient or unsafe to answer the cellphone. You’ve got the technology - why not use it?

Don’t even try to take notes!

And I can’t believe I have to mention this, but it’s been documented (no pun intended) as a significant problem. DO NOT take

notes while you’re driving. Pull over, wait for a red light or stop sign, or ask the caller to phone back so you’re not hurtling down the highway at 80 km/h searching for a pen and an old receipt to scribble on. There is no way you can drive safely and jot down a number or two at the same time.

I’ll keep you posted on the cellphone debate as more data becomes available. Until then, here’s one more safety note to discuss over dinner this evening: some consumer groups are asking whether cellphones can cause injury if they’re being held near the driver’s face when an airbag deploys. Again, not enough information is available yet, but it’s coming.

That’s it for this week. Until next week, be **RoadWise**.

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