



CRD Traffic Safety Commission

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and

Susan Lucas,
Director of Driver and Vehicle Licensing,
Insurance Corporation of BC,
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On behalf of the Capital Regional District Traffic Safety Commission, we write in response to the Justice Ministry's call for feedback, to support the concept of increasing penalties for those caught using a handheld electronic device while driving a motor vehicle here in BC.

The CRD Traffic Safety Commission is an independent commission established by bylaw of the Capital Regional District. It is multi-disciplinary in nature, including representatives of such groups as police, ICBC, public health, coroners, education, the media, and the cycling community. Its mandate is to undertake projects with the aim of reducing deaths and injuries resulting from motor vehicle incidents in this area.

At our July meeting, Commission members voted unanimously to support the concept of implementing increased penalties for the use of handheld devices. It was noted that current penalties are amongst the lowest in Canada, and, judged by observations carried out by police officers, do not appear to be having the needed deterrent effect.

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Indeed, police officers related stories of being told by some drivers stopped for the offence that the fine is "just a cost of doing business."

It is thus apparent that tougher penalties, such as increased fines and/or vehicle impoundments or license suspensions for repeat offenders, need to be adopted to deter this dangerous practice.

Some specific suggestions put forward by the Commission include:

- That the issue of Learner and Novice drivers using handheld devices be addressed as a specific topic in the upcoming ICBC review of the Graduated Licensing Program. As part of the Coroners Service Death Review Panel into the deaths of young drivers, ICBC has agreed to take the lead in this review. With numerous studies showing that high proportions of young drivers admit to either having used hand-held devices while driving, or to riding as a passenger with a driver who is doing so, this would appear to be an appropriate subject to form part of this review. To discourage new drivers from engaging in dangerous behaviours from the outset, we would support GLP drivers having their GLP licence suspended, and/or their minimum time in the program being extended after a first distracted driving offense.
- That consideration be given to levying higher penalties for texting or other activities that take both a driver's hands off the wheel and their eyes off the road, as opposed to talking on a cellphone. Several academic studies have shown that texting and related activities are significantly more likely to lead to a crash than are other types of driver distraction.
- That repeat offenders should receive escalating penalties, including the possibility of vehicle impoundment or license suspension. This would, we hope, remove the "cost of doing business" excuse, as the penalties would be too severe at that point. If impoundment is to be considered, we recommend it be on the same basis as the IRP for impaired driving, in which the vehicle would be impounded no matter whether the driver is the registered owner or not.



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- That WorkSafeBC be encouraged to take a stronger stand against any type of mobile phone use or texting by employees who are driving, with consideration being given to imposing hefty monetary penalties for employers who do not specifically ban their employees from doing this. Employees often report having either been directly pressured to respond to calls and texts while driving, or sense that it is needed to remain competitive.
- That any increased penalties should also be accompanied by continued and enhanced public education programs, using both mainstream and social media. These programs should focus on the dangers of driving distracted as well as the high likelihood of being caught, and should also stress that handheld devices are not the only causes of distracted driving, and that other distractions may be equally dangerous.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to participate in this consultation; we wish you the best of luck in your continued road safety endeavours.

Sincerely,

Chris Foord,
Chair

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