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Understanding The Issues That Affect You

THIS ISSUE:

*The Rules
of the Road
Have Changed*



Are You Hands-Free?

What's New For Ontario Drivers?

On October 26th, 2009, the rules of the road changed in Ontario. Drivers can expect to face fines for talking, texting, typing, dialing or emailing on a hand-held cell phone. The law extends to any hand-held communications or entertainment devices. Laptops and DVD players cannot be in your field of vision.

The only exception for driving with a hand-held phone is made for calling 911 in an emergency situation. In all other instances, drivers are encouraged to use hands-free devices such as a cell phone with an earpiece or headset that uses voice activated dialing or is plugged into your vehicle's sound system. You are permitted to use a wireless device that requires a button to be pushed to activate or terminate the call.

GPS screens that are secured to your dashboard and do not impede your view are also allowed, however, you must program your GPS prior to beginning your drive. Remember, the new law applies to MP3

players and iPods – you are allowed to use them, but cannot touch or change their functionality while driving.

If you are not interested in upgrading to a hands-free device, you are still allowed to safely pull off to the side of the road to make a call or answer your phone.

Ensure that your hands-free technology is properly installed. If you are unsure, visit the store where you purchased the equipment or visit your local car dealership.

What If You Get Caught?

The new law became effective October 26, 2009, however, the government is phasing it in gradually. This means that you will not get fined if caught driving with a hand-held device up until February 1st, 2010. This three month window allows you to make any necessary technology upgrades and get accustomed to the new law.

After February 1, 2010, you could be fined up to \$500 if you use a prohibited device.

Exceptions For Commercial Drivers

There are some exceptions to the new law for commercial drivers. School bus and taxi drivers, couriers and public service workers (e.g., transit and highway maintenance workers) are allowed to use wireless communication devices that aren't hand-held, as well as display screens because they depend on them to perform their job.

There is a three-year phase-out period until January 1, 2013 for the commercial use of two-way radios, including mobile and CB radios to allow for hands-free technologies to be developed.

The new law does not affect mobile data terminals, logistical tracking devices and dispatching devices. They are permitted for commercial and public service vehicle drivers who are engaged in the performance of their duties.

Hand-mikes (push-to-talk systems) and portable radios or "walkie-talkies" may be used in a hands-free mode. Drivers may use a lapel button or other hands-free application as long as the hand-mike or walkie-talkie is not held while driving.

For more information on specific exemptions for commercial, emergency, and other public service drivers, visit the MTO website www.mto.gov.on.ca to download a copy of Ontario Regulation 366/09.

Did You Know?

- Studies show that a driver using a cell phone is four times more likely to be in a crash than a driver focused on the road.
- Among truck drivers, dialing a cell phone while driving resulted in a 5.9 times greater risk, and text messaging resulted in a 23.2-times greater risk.
- Ontario joins more than 50 countries worldwide that have similar legislation.

