

Mobile Phones – Guidance Notes

(The same general advice is applicable to two-way radios.)

1. Mobile phones and driving

- You must exercise proper control of your vehicle at all times.
- No driver should use a mobile telephone (whether hand-held or hands-free) while driving.
- Use voicemail or divert calls so that messages can be left for you while your phone is switched off.

2. Use of mobile phones in petrol stations or near flammable liquids

- Mobile phones should be switched off in the vicinity of petrol station forecourts.
- Mobile phones should be switched off in any work area where large quantities of solvents are stored or where motor vehicles are serviced.

3. Risks to health associated with mobile phones

- Spend minimal time on mobile phone calls.
- Use landline phones where practicable, especially for long calls.
- Make fewer mobile phone calls.
- Use hands-free mobile phone kits (not while driving!)
- Hold the phone away from the ear, rather than pressed close to the side of the head.

4. Two-way radios

- Two-way radios should not be used while driving.
- Switch off radios in petrol stations.
- Switch off radios if in work areas where large quantities of flammable liquids are stored.

Background

1. Mobile phones and driving

RoSPA, the Institute of Advanced Motorists and advice given in a leaflet published by the Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions all recommend that drivers should not use any type of mobile phone while driving.

Road accident data does not record whether a driver involved in an accident was using a mobile phone so statistical data is not available. However, coroners' inquests and police investigations have cited the use of a mobile phone as a contributory factor in many fatal road accidents.

Studies carried out in the USA, Canada and Scandinavia indicate that drivers using hand-held or hands-free phones to all intents and purposes become blind to the traffic around them. Most of these studies involved vehicles with automatic transmission systems and the majority of the systems were hands-free. Even using a hands-free phone while driving an automatic car significantly distracts the driver.

The Law

From 1st December 2003 an amendment to the Road Vehicles(Construction and Use) Regulations 1986 will mean that anyone driving a motor vehicle who is caught using a hand-held mobile phone will be subject to an on the spot fine of £30 (increasing to £1000 if the matter goes to court). Text messaging and using a hand –held with an earpiece or a microphone will also be banned. The Government are planning to introduce further legislation to make it an endorsable offence i.e. three points on your licence.

The position before 1st December 2003

Drivers must have proper control of their vehicle at all times. You can be prosecuted for careless or inconsiderate driving, or even dangerous driving, if using a mobile phone causes you to drive in this way. The penalties include unlimited fines, disqualification and up to two years' imprisonment. It can also be an offence for employers to require their employees to use mobile phones while driving.

2. Use of mobile phones in petrol stations

Reports of mobile phones igniting petrol fumes in petrol station forecourts apparently originated in Australia. Investigations by the fire service of New South Wales failed to substantiate the reports of these incidents.

Petrol stations do display notices warning customers to switch off mobile phones when entering filling stations.

Mobile phone instruction booklets also contain a warning to "Make sure your phone is switched off in petrol stations".

It is theoretically possible that the phone battery, in certain circumstances could create a spark.

While filling the vehicle, a phone in your pocket or left on top of the boot will clearly be close to the petrol fumes from the petrol tank.

Although the evidence is not overwhelming that fires can be caused by mobile phone it is sensible advice to switch off mobile phones in petrol stations.

3. Risks to health associated with mobile phones

Radio waves can cause heating in human tissue. Heat from these waves can damage human cells if sufficient energy is transferred to the tissue. However the energy output from mobile phones is at least 100 times below the level seen to cause effects in non-human laboratory tests. Most scientists carrying out this research do not believe the energy from the radio waves is sufficient to cause cell damage.

No study has been able to eliminate totally the possibility of harm from radio waves put out by mobile phones during use.

It is wise for mobile phone users to limit their exposure by following the advice given above.

4. Two-way radios

The problems caused by mobile phones could also be caused by using the type of two-way radios used by LMU FMD staff.

Two-way radios can cause a distraction if used while driving.

It is possible that a spark may be produced from a radio in the same way that sparks may be produced by the use of mobile phones.

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