

Goal

The goal of this training program is to provide information for employers regarding the hazards of using cell phones or other similar devices while driving and to provide information regarding implementing a cell phone use policy.

Objective

The employer will be provided the information to develop a cell phone use policy to protect the employee and company.

Background

The use of a cell phone plays an integral role in our society. According to the Cellular Telecommunications & Internet Association the number of people who use cell phones has increased from 4.3 million in 1990 to 175 million as of January 2005. Increased cell phone use has led to a rise in use while driving.

There are two dangers associated with using a cell phone while driving. First, drivers must take their eyes off the road while using the phone. Second, people can become so absorbed in their phones that they are distracted, jeopardizing their safety and the safety of passengers, pedestrians, and other drivers.



Cellular Telephone Use Policy

What is an employer to do? First, develop a policy regarding use of cell phones by employees and second, enforce it. Having a policy with no attempt to enforce it is worse than having no policy at all.

The key is to have a policy that prohibits using a cell phone in any way that violates federal, state, or local laws or in a way is otherwise unsafe.

An employer's policy should recognize the need for some flexibility, and more importantly, employers must convey the message that the policy's purpose is to ensure employee safety. Safe use of a cell phone does not necessarily preclude efficient operations or reduced productivity. Rather, it requires following common sense principles of safe driving.

Create a policy that works. Develop a policy that is practical, legal, and reflects the organization's risk tolerance. Some companies no longer provide cell phones and refuse to reimburse drivers for cell phone related expenses. Others permit or provide a cell phone, but very clearly specify how and when it may be used. If a policy allows cell phone use in emergency situations, be sure to define what constitutes an "emergency."

Reinforce the policy. Provide all new hires with a copy of the cellular telephone policy and review it in detail during their orientation. Cover safe cellular telephone use in all driver-training programs and in periodic reminders, such as in an employee newsletter.

Inform drivers. Ensure that drivers understand the reason for the cellular telephone use policy – including the increased odds of an accident, the potential liability for the company, and the possibility of personal injuries or fatalities. Outline the ways in which cell phones pose these risks so drivers will understand how to reduce their odds of an accident.

The following are some policies for employers to consider when developing a Cell Phone or Other Similar Equipment Use Policy:

- Prohibit the use of a cell phone by a driver while the vehicle is in motion.
- Ban cell phone use while operating: 1) a company-owned vehicle, 2) a personal vehicle while conducting company business, or 3) while operating any vehicle, even if the phone is furnished or required by the company.
- Recommend or require the use of hands-free devices for cell phones.
- State that the primary function of the driver is to drive the vehicle and should additional tasks be necessary, they should be handled by a passenger/co-worker or the vehicle should be

stopped in a safe place prior to undertaking any additional tasks.

- State that employees charged with traffic violations resulting from the use of their cell phones while driving will be responsible for all penalties that result from such actions, whether on a personal or business cell phone.
- Instruct drivers to forward calls to voicemail while driving to avoid being distracted by an incoming call.

An employer cell phone use policy should explain the potential consequences and be outlined in the general employment policy or employee handbook. Employees should sign an acknowledgement and agree to comply with its terms and conditions.

Opposite is a sample template of a cell phone (and similar equipment) policy that can be modified and used by your company.

Cell Phone and Similar Equipment Policy for Those Driving

The _____(Company's) policy is that cell phone(s) and other electronic devices shall not be used while driving or at times when such use might be distracting to the user or otherwise cause a dangerous situation. Everyone should ensure that use of a cell phone or other device does not interfere with safe performance of the job task being performed or the operation of any motor vehicle or mobile equipment. As an employee, I understand that failure to comply with this policy could result in corrective action, up to and including termination.

Employee Acknowledgement:

Date:

Supervisor Acknowledgement:

Review Questions:

1. What are the two dangers of operating a cellular telephone while operating a vehicle?
2. What are the reasons to inform drivers of the risks of using a cell phone while operating a vehicle?
3. When should the employer notify the employee of the cell phone use policy?

Answers

1. First, drivers must take their eyes off the road while using a cell phone. Second, people can become so absorbed in their phones that they are distracted, jeopardizing their safety and the safety of passengers, pedestrians, and other drivers.
2. Ensure that drivers understand the reason for the cellular telephone use policy – including the increased odds of an accident, the potential liability for the company, and the possibility of personal injuries or fatalities.
3. Provide all new hires with a copy of the cellular telephone policy and review it in detail during their orientation. Cover safe cellular telephone use in all driver-training programs and in periodic reminders, such as in an employee newsletter.

For more information on driving distractions and other topics see the Service Lloyds website. In Risk Control's Training Materials section, we have additional resources including:

- Driving and Cell Phone Use Policy – Sample Safety Program
- Driving Distractions – Toolbox Talk
- Driving Safety Tips – Toolbox Talk
- Are You Road Wise? – Toolbox Talk

Remember to practice Safety; don't learn it by accident.

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