



B.C. BANS CELL PHONE USE BEHIND THE WHEEL

Your dad is whipping down the Steveston Highway when his cell phone rings. Instinctively, he grabs for it. You hold your breath. You're both aware of the new law against talking and driving. A tough decision plays out on your dad's face as he tries to decide whether to answer the call. In the end, he lets it go to voicemail. You breathe a sigh of relief. Old habits are hard to break, aren't they?

NEW YEAR, NEW LAW

As of January 1, a new B.C. law bans drivers from talking on handheld phones while driving. The only legal way to talk on the phone and drive is to use a **hands-free device**. Otherwise, motorists have to pull over and find a place to park their vehicle before they have their conversation.

And as for new drivers, or drivers who are just learning the ropes? They're not allowed to have any kind of phone conversations behind the wheel, hands-free or not. According to the Insurance Corporation of British Columbia (ICBC), these drivers are less experienced and are at greater risk of crashing. They need to be more fully focused on the road and other road users.

But the law doesn't just cut conversations short. There's to be no texting or reading emails behind the wheel, either, and no fiddling with the **GPS**. And as for shuffling the playlist on your iPod? Forget about it.

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

Experts say cell phone use behind the wheel is the leading cause of distracted driving. An average of 117 British Columbians die every year at the hands of distracted drivers. Another 1,400 are sent to hospital for their injuries. With the ban in place, officials expect B.C.'s roads to become safer places.

"British Columbians overwhelmingly support this new legislation, which will reduce the number of crashes and **fatalities** on the province's roads," said ICBC road safety expert Don Miller.

EXCEPTIONS TO THE RULE

Police, ambulance workers and fire fighters are still allowed to make calls, however, provided those calls are necessary in the line of

phones behind the wheel. But come February, drivers are in the hotseat. Those caught driving and chatting will have to pay a fine of \$167. And drivers caught texting or emailing will have three **demerits** added to their driving licence.

But some say that even with these penalties, it's going to take a while for drivers to kick their bad habits.

"There was a time when everybody thought having a few beers and driving was OK, and now it's almost like we have to create a similar negative **stigma** with talking on cell phones," said an Abbotsford police officer. ★

DID YOU KNOW?

Research shows drivers are four times as likely to crash when they're talking on the phone. Behind-the-wheel texters are 23 times as likely to have an accident.

duty. Motorists will be allowed to call 911 in emergencies. And truck drivers will still be able to use their two-way radios.

WARNINGS PRECEDE ENFORCEMENT

During the month of January, police across B.C. were planning to issue warnings only to motorists who were caught using their cell

DEFINITIONS

DEMERIT POINTS: a penalty of between 2 and 10 points is awarded for each instance of poor driving behaviours (speeding, driving dangerously or failing to stop for a police officer, etc.).

Demerits stay on a driver's record for two years. An accumulation of demerits may result in the driver losing his/her licence.

FATALITIES: deaths

GPS: global positioning systems use satellite signals to pinpoint a specific location on the earth's surface

HANDS-FREE DEVICE: a headset or Bluetooth mechanism that allows a driver to talk without touching his/her phone

STIGMA: severe social disapproval of behaviours that go against accepted cultural norms



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ANSWER THE FOLLOWING IN COMPLETE SENTENCES:

1. What law has just been passed in British Columbia?

2. List the driver actions prohibited by B.C.'s new motor vehicle law.

3. Describe the penalties for breaking the law.

4. For what reason are the restrictions even tighter on new drivers?

5. Across B.C., what is the annual impact of distracted driving?

6. As you see it, would a negative stigma around talking while driving lead to greater safety on B.C.'s roads? Or would stiffer penalties be more effective? Give reasons to support your response.
