



SASKATCHEWAN BANS DRIVER CHIT-CHAT

You and your sister are bombing along Ring Road when your cell phone goes off. The call display tells you it's your best friend. You don't think twice. Right away, you flip it open and start gabbing.

From behind the wheel, your sister shoots you a glare. You grin and shrug. Too bad for her. Only passengers are allowed to talk on cell phones while the car's in motion.

BAN KICKS OFF NEW YEAR

A new law went into effect on January 1 to make Saskatchewan roads safer. The provincial government has banned drivers from using handheld phones while driving. Motorists aren't allowed to talk or text behind the wheel anymore. They can't surf or send emails, either.

Drivers caught breaking the law will have to shell out \$280. And they'll get four **demerit points** added to their driver's licence, too.

REASONS FOR THE LAW

Experts say talking or texting behind the wheel creates a distraction and takes a driver's attention off the road. About 25 percent of Saskatchewan accidents are the result of distracted driving. The Insurance Bureau of Canada (IBC) says drivers who talk on cell phones are six times as likely to crash as drivers who don't. And people who text while driving? They're 23 times as likely to get into an accident.

"There is no question that this legislation will make our province's roads safer," said Lindsay Olson,

IBC vice-president for B.C., Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

WHEN IS IT OK TO TALK?

Motorists must use a **hands-free device** if they wish to drive and talk at the same time. Otherwise, they must pull over and find a legal place to park before taking – or making – a call. Only **emergency personnel** and drivers making calls to 911 will be exempt from the legislation.

New drivers won't be allowed to use phones at all, even if they're hands-free. That's because they're still learning how to manage all the risks of the road. Only experienced drivers may use handheld devices to have their phone conversations.

"There are going to be some difficult situations where [police] can't see the cell phone, especially in a texting situation where the head is just down behind the driver's wheel. So there's going to be some challenges for enforcement, but we've had those challenges before," said RCMP Staff Sergeant Ian Mitchell. ★

DID YOU KNOW?

Police in British Columbia only issued warnings to drivers in January. But Saskatchewan police have been enforcing the law since day one.

IS A BAN THE BEST PLAN?

Saskatchewan and B.C. are the latest provinces to create legislation dealing with cell phone use behind the wheel. Alberta and New Brunswick are the only provinces who have yet to agree on a ban.

Banning handheld devices behind the wheel won't stop all driver distraction. And it's hard for police to catch everyone who's breaking the law. But traffic safety experts say the ban is a step in the right direction.

DEFINITIONS

DEMERIT POINTS: a penalty of between 2 and 10 points 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.

EMERGENCY PERSONNEL: firefighters, police officers, ambulance drivers

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



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ANSWER THE FOLLOWING IN COMPLETE SENTENCES:

1. What law has just been passed in Saskatchewan?

2. List the driver actions prohibited by Saskatchewan'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. Why is it so challenging for police to catch all offenders?

6. As you see it, why might it be hard for people to change their habits with regard to using their cell phones behind the wheel?
