Cell Phones And Driving Essay, Research Paper

Cellular telephones are fast becoming an important factor in highway safety. ?Cellular phones are becoming increasingly universal, marked by a 1,685 percent increase in the number of users from 1988 to 1995.?(CTIA page 1 of 3) There are many studies currently being made looking into the risks involved with driving vehicles and talking on cellular phones. Many states are even experimenting with the idea of tickets for talking and driving. Such ticketing would affect a great deal of people. The number of business people using their cellular phones in their every day job, which often involves a lot of travel, is constantly increasing. ?Nearly 34 million subscribers rely on their cellular phones to conduct business or just talk to friends and family.?(CTIA page 1 of 3) This such increase also brings about a rise in phone related accidents. The need for safety policies is turning a great deal of heads.

State policymakers, however, must weigh the benefits of wireless technology against the growing evidence of the potential dangers of cell phones in automobiles. Several recent studies correlate driver use of cellular telephones with an increased risk of crash. A study, of 699 drivers who had used cellular phones, published in the New England Journal of Medicine concluded, ?The use of cellular telephones in motor vehicles is associated with the quadrupling of the risk of a collision during the brief period of a call.?(Redelmeier) It was also shown that dialing and answering a phone provide the same impairment as driving while intoxicated. The report found no distinction in safety between hand-held cell phone devices and hands-free devices.

Talking on cellular phones affect a person in several ways. For example, the emotional stress involved in a conversation can lead to a decreased awareness in what is happening on the road. Having to dial phone numbers and answering calls really take your attention away from the road. It is hard to look at the dangers of using a cellular phone when there are so many good uses. Many people depend on their phone for many aspects of their job and could not get by without it. It is possible for them to take a minute and get off of the road and talk before heading back out. This would decrease the number of accidents a great deal. Many cellular phones are used for emergency calls and reporting drunks, but this can also be done while the car is parked. Someone who is going to call in an emergency will not be cruising down the road. Wireless technology proponents argue that phones are no more distracting than a radio, food or the vanity mirror. They say that the same reckless driving laws as any other driver should cover people who drive carelessly while using a car phone. As more constituents report near misses with drivers using car phones, however, legislators may feel growing pressure to specifically restrict cellular phone use in automobiles.

All states make reckless or careless driving illegal. Few states, however, specifically regulate cellular phone use in automobiles. California, Florida and Massachusetts impose minor restrictions on cellular telephones in automobiles. In California, rental cars with cellular telephone equipment must include written operating instructions for safe use. In Florida, cellular phone use is permitted in an automobile as long as it provides sound through one ear and allows surrounding sound to be heard with the other ear. In Massachusetts, car phones are permitted as long as they do not interfere with vehicle operation, and drivers keep one hand on the steering wheel at all times. Colorado is currently working to pass a law that would make talking on a phone a minor offense. It could only be cited in concurrence with another violation, wearing a seatbelt would be an example of that type of ticket. Oklahoma and Minnesota require police to include information about cellular telephones in accident reports. No state bans wireless phones in automobiles.

At least 22 states since 1995 have proposed bills concerning cellular telephones in automobiles. Legislation varied in severity from proposals that would ban all use in vehicles, to requirements for hands-free devices, phone call length restrictions and requirements to keep one ear free. Although none of the bills have passed yet, legislation is still pending in Georgia, Illinois, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and New York. To date, the federal government has not acted to limit cellular telephone use in automobiles. Traffic safety laws and enforcement are traditionally within the scope of state law.

Because so few states regulate wireless technology in motor vehicles, it is difficult to measure the effectiveness of the new laws. Car phone regulations in foreign jurisdictions, however, provide valuable insight. At least seven countries-including England, Switzerland, Spain, Australia, Israel, and Italy, restrict or prohibit cell phone use while driving a motor vehicle.

Wireless telephone use among drivers will continue to grow. As use increases, state legislatures will be increasingly challenged to balance safety concerns against the obvious benefits of the new technology. Already, state legislatures are considering measures to improve data collection, link cellular phones with insurance, and restrict use of wireless telephones in motor vehicles.

The Cellular Communications Industry Association. ?Talking on the Phone and Driving: An Unsafe Connection.? July 1997. February 20, 2000.

Redelmeier, Donald A. and Robert J. Tibshirani. ?Association Between Cellular-Telephone Calls and Motor Vehicle Collisions.? The New England Journal ofMedicine. Feb. 13, 1997.