

Cell phones and safety

By Tim Govenor

Before you begin

If your company has policies regarding cell phone use and safety, obtain a copy to share with the employees. If no policy exists, consider this topic for discussion with other leaders.



It is estimated in 2005 there were 1.3 billion cell phone users worldwide. "Can you hear me now?" the catchphrase used by Verizon, has become part of our culture. Cell phone use has expanded into every activity in our lives, from emergency communication to picking products from a grocery shelf. It sometimes seems people have no idea what to do with a spare moment other than make a cell phone call.

Ask the group what they have seen people doing while talking on a cell phone. Answers may include grocery shopping, driving, walking, bicycling, standing in line, waiting in a restaurant, using the restroom, eating or attending a meeting.

Ask the group to identify their thoughts when in the presence of someone answering or using a cell phone. Possible answers include:

- It gets my attention;
- It is rude;
- I do not care to hear the conversation;
- The conversation is interesting;
- Why do people speak so loudly using a cell phone;
- They interrupt my thoughts;
- They disturb the peace;
- Go someplace else with your phone.

Research shows cell phone use represents a great distraction for the user. Think about the activities associated with using a cell phone.

Ask the group what possible distractions are associated with using a cell-phone before, during and after phone use. The list might include:

- Finding the phone;
- Activating the phone;
- Looking at the phone to determine the incoming number or messages;
- Keeping one hand free to handle the phone;
- Focusing on who you will call;
- Looking at the phone while dialing;
- Scrolling through menus;
- Retrieving paper or pencil;
- Making notes;
- Listening to voice prompts for message retrieval;
- Deleting or saving messages;
- Checking to see if the signal has been dropped during a call.

Conclusion

Whether you are in the presence of a user or you use a cell phone personally, using the phone is a significant distraction. Being distracted while driving, while operating tools and equipment, when walking across the street, when in public or at work increases the risk of injuries and crashes.

Researchers have compared the level of distraction to a blood alcohol level of 0.08. Research also has shown that a cell phone conversation while driving is a greater distraction than conversing with a passenger. Research has also shown that drivers "reacted significantly slower to unexpected events in the first two minutes of the phone conversation and are, for a large part of the conversation, unaware of traffic movements around them."

Given this information, ask the group what can be done to reduce the distractions from cell phone use. Their answers may include:

- Ignore calls while driving or performing detailed or hazardous activities;
- Restrict cell phone use in hazardous areas;
- If driving, pull off the road to a safe location to answer or make cell phone calls;
- Stop what you are doing to focus on the call;
- Turn the cell phone off and utilize voice mail or messaging service;
- Leave the cell phone at home;
- Ask passengers in your vehicle to handle cell phone activities.

Action items

- Create, review or revise your workplace cell phone policy.
- Because you are aware cell phone use is distracting, adopt a personal policy to limit phone use in situations that pose risk of injury or crash.
- Being aware cell phone use is distracting and annoying to others in the vicinity, be especially discrete when using a cell phone.

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We always strive to improve the Safety Leader's Discussion Guide. Your feedback can help. Please send your comments via e-mail to **Safety@ohiobwc.com**.

References

Web sites

- Cell Phone Users Drive Like Old Folks (University of Utah): <http://unews.utah.edu/releases/05/feb/cellphones.html>
- The Influence of the Use of Mobile Phones on Driver Situation Awareness (Parkes and Hooijmeijer): www.nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/departments/Human%20Factors/driver-distraction/PDF/2.PDF

Videos

BWC's Division of Safety & Hygiene's video library has a number of videos on cell phone use and distracted driving. These are available for loan to Ohio employers.

Order a catalog by calling **1-800-OHIOBWC** (ask for the video library), or visit our Web site, **ohiobwc.com**.