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DISTRACTIONS

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Using a phone while driving

**It's better to keep both hands on the wheel while you're driving!
Driving is a multi-task activity that requires the full attention and concentration of drivers, even the most experienced ones.**

Whether it is a route frequently taken by the driver or not, a large quantity of information has to be handled and, depending on traffic conditions, the driver must make the right decisions, even if these are quite often ordinary automatic actions.

The more a driver is distracted, the more his/her concentration and reactivity decrease.

Using the telephone while driving, consulting text messages or voicemail, programming the navigation system, adjusting the radio, changing a CD, and any other activity that involves the driver taking his/her eyes or mind off the road are harmless distractions in everyday life but extremely dangerous for the driver of a car.

Using a phone while driving

Using a phone and driving are incompatible.

Of all the relatively numerous sources of distraction in a car, the phone, even if it is used with a hands-free kit, is one of the most dangerous.

Using a phone projects the driver's thoughts elsewhere, outside the vehicle. It is as if he/she were abandoning control of the vehicle to join the person at the other end of the phone.

What the law says

- Any telephone installation must be firmly fixed in the vehicle (or helmet)
- Using a Bluetooth earpiece is authorised

- Once the vehicle is in motion, the driver is only authorised to take one hand off the steering wheel (or handlebars) to activate or deactivate the telephone installation
- The driver must be able to keep both hands on the steering wheel while listening or speaking
- The penalty for breaking the law is a fine of 74 euros

Effects on driving

Many studies and experiments show that holding a phone conversation while driving results in:

- variations in speed
- frequent variability in lane tracking
- an increase in reaction time of an average of 50%
- errors of perception and judgement

The effects of using a phone while driving are similar to those of alcohol:

"When the driver uses the telephone, attention is concentrated on what he/she hears directly; the discrepancy between what is seen and what is heard seriously disturbs the driver's spatial perception. As a result, more than three quarters of drivers in the middle of a telephone conversation forget to stop at pedestrian crossings. Barely a third of them can recall the road signs that they have just driven past."

According to a study carried out by the French national institute for research on transport and safety (Institut National de Recherche sur les Transports et leur Sécurité - INRETS):

“... telephoning while driving is a factor of distraction for drivers and hence a factor of risk for their safety and that of other road-users; this applies to every stage in the phone call including, of course, looking for the number in the list of contacts and dialling. The dangerous nature of this has indeed been demonstrated unanimously.”

Did you know?

- Contrary to popular belief, there is a fundamental difference between talking to a passenger and talking on the phone while driving. Unlike the passenger, the person on the phone who is not in the vehicle and therefore does not see the road at the same time as the driver, will not stop talking if there is some danger or if traffic conditions call for the driver's full attention.
- Nearly half drivers answer their phone within two seconds, thereby giving priority to doing so - their attention is no longer on their driving.
- Drivers feel the extra mental load and instinctively react by reducing speed, by 12% on average, which could be dangerous in heavy traffic.
- Not only is the risk of an accident increased while actually handling the telephone; it is also - and above all - increased by the mental effort the telephone conversation demands.
- The content of the conversation and particularly its emotional charge may accentuate the decrease in concentration, and may even extend it beyond the duration of the phone call. This loss of attention is the same whether the driver uses a hands-free kit, an earpiece or a hand-held phone.

Some advice

- Comply with the law and use a hands-free kit if, despite everything, you can't stop yourself phoning while you are driving or if you have to be reachable
- Tell the person you are talking to that you are driving and call back as soon as you have found a safe, proper place to stop
- Only phone in case of need
- Keep it brief and to the point
- Let your voicemail answer for you, so that you don't miss any calls while you are driving. And put your phone on "vibrate" or "silent" so you won't be taken by surprise if it rings
- To listen to your messages and make calls, stop in a suitable place - a car park, parking bay, rest area, etc. On the motorway, stop at a service area, never on the hard shoulder. Even if you are witness to an accident, don't use your phone until you have stopped in a safe place
- Sending and receiving SMS and MMS messages is obviously incompatible with driving. To read incoming messages, or to send an SMS or MMS, or to use multimedia services or the Internet, stop in an appropriate place, even if the information is about your itinerary
- Whenever possible, hand your mobile phone to one of your passengers, so that another person can answer for you

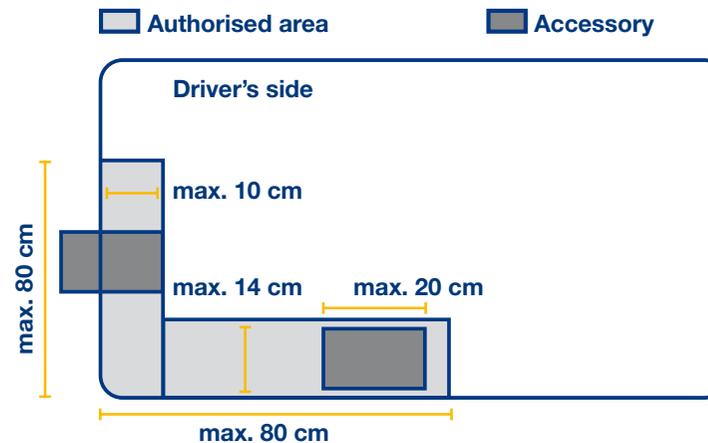
Navigation system (GPS)

GPS is only a system for assisting you in driving - you are still responsible for the decisions to be made.

Like the phone, GPS (**Global Positioning System**) can be very useful, particularly in helping you while driving, and even in avoiding stress situations, on condition that you always stick to a few basic rules.

What the law says

Fixing a navigation system on the inside of the wind-screen is only authorised if it does not obstruct the driver's view and if neither the screen nor the fixing system exceeds the areas marked in grey on the following diagram:



Some advice

- Always programme your GPS before you set off
- If you have to change your route or find an address, stop in an appropriate place - car park, parking bay, rest area, etc. - and not on a double file, or when you are stopped at a traffic light. On the motorway, stop at a service area, never on the hard shoulder or an emergency stopping place
- Turn down the volume of your radio so that you can hear all the instructions given by the GPS system

Sources: [La Sécurité Routière \(Luxembourg\)](#) (Association for road safety), La Prévention Routière (France) (Association for the prevention of road accidents), INRETS: [National institute for research on transport and safety](#) (Institut National de Recherche sur les Transports et leur Sécurité - France)