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WITH TECHNOLOGY COMES NEW RISKS

Electronic devices in the modern marketplace are substantially smaller and have far more functionality than prior models. As a result of the reduction in size, people can now use many of these powerful devices while driving. For example, a driver can now take calls, listen to music, get directions, send and receive text messages, and even send and receive email all while behind the wheel of a car. But these powerful new devices bring a whole new world of risk to the roads by taking drivers' attention away from the road.

Ideally, drivers can eliminate the risk associated with portable devices by simply not using any electronic devices while driving. But, in the modern world, a driver may not have a choice in the matter. For example, many shipping companies boast that consumers and shippers can view the location of shipped items through the companies' websites. In order for shipping companies to provide these services they must maintain regular contact with their truck drivers, and the drivers must constantly keep track of their positions. Often that means that truck drivers must use electronics while driving in order to satisfy the requirements of their jobs.

If a driver must use an electronic device while on the road, then there are several ways to reduce the risk involved and limit potential legal liability.

WHAT ATTORNEYS AND COMPANIES SHOULD KNOW AND DO

When possible avoid using more than one device or function on a device at one time

The large variety and multi-functionality of modern mobile devices make it possible for a driver to use more than one device or more than one function of a single device while driving. Considering that using a single device or function can significantly increase a driver's likelihood of an accident, adding more devices or functions to the equation simply increases the risk of accidents. Therefore, if a driver must use an electronic device while driving, he or she should only use one at a time in order to keep the risk of an accident at a minimum.

Avoid Text Messaging

Text messaging takes substantially more of a driver's attention than talking on the phone. In fact, according to Washington State Rep. Joyce McDonald, the average driver will take their eyes off the road approximately 14 times every 30 seconds when text messaging. Furthermore, a study conducted by the University of Utah found that drivers, who engage in text messaging while driving, are six times as likely to have an accident those who do not. In order to avoid the dangers of text-messaging while driving, drivers should prefer voice calls to text-message as much as possible. And in the event that a voice call will not suffice, the driver should consider sending text messages when their vehicle is stopped.

Avoid conversations which elicit emotional responses

Cell phone use in general while driving substantially distracts a driver's attention from the road. Researchers have actually found that drivers who use cell phones are four times as likely to have an accident as those that do not. But when a driver engages in an emotionally charged conversation on a cell phone, they generally give the call more attention, which distracts them from the road even more. Drivers will be safer if they save emotionally charged conversations for when their vehicle is stopped.

Stow any chargers or other cords in a compartment in your vehicle

An excess of anything in a car can get in the drivers way. But power cords and other related parts of electronic devices can often be more distracting. Most vehicles have a cigarette lighter, where power cords are plugged into, located very close to the steering column so that drivers have easy access to it. While the location of the cigarette lighter makes lighting a cigarette more convenient, if a driver uses the lighter as a power source, the power cords can become entangled in the steering wheel and cause an accident. Additionally, if an accident occurs, the presence of a power cord may be used as evidence that the driver was using an electronic device at the time of the accident, regardless of whether or not the driver was actually using one.

Use a Bluetooth or other hands free equipment when driving

While drivers should avoid using cell phones or other devices as much as possible while driving, sometimes they must. In those cases where a driver must use a cell phone, a hands-free kit can substantially improve their chances of not having an accident. Hands free cell phone kits are nothing new, but Bluetooth devices have had a profound impact on the hands free market.

Simply walk through a grocery store and you will likely see people walking and talking as they shop. Any type of hands-free kit, Bluetooth or otherwise, can help a driver keep his or her attention on the road, improving their chances of remaining accident free. Additionally, many cities and municipalities are now prohibiting driving and using a cell phone or handheld device during certain times of the day and in school zones.

CONCLUSION

Advancements in technology have had a profound impact on the American marketplace. Modern electronics are now smaller and much more powerful than ever. These advancements have made life more convenient for consumers, but they have also made driving substantially more risky. Although it may no longer be possible to completely avoid using electronics while driving, the amount of risk involved in using these devices may be substantially reduced by simply limiting their use while driving.

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