

Hang Up and Drive

You see it every day, especially in freeway traffic. A car is weaving back and forth, speeding up then slowing down, or suddenly stopping. No, it's not a drunk driver. It's a cell-phone driver. Cell phones are used everywhere, but on the road they are a dangerous distraction to drivers and should be prohibited.

The New England Journal of Medicine reported that "motorists using a cell phone were four times more likely to have an accident than those not using a phone." The major problem is that the driver is not focused on the road, but on his or her conversation. Cell-phone drivers are very unpredictable: they weave, tailgate, drive too fast or too slow, make improper turns, run red lights, and even stop at green ones. It's not only annoying; it's hazardous. Cell-phone-related accidents include rear-ending vehicles; running off a road and crashing into trees, fences, and buildings; flipping over; and having head-on collisions. Many of these accidents result in fatalities. In October at the California Traffic Safety Summit, experts testified that "cell phones used by drivers lead to at least 1,000 deaths per year in California." These are the same problems that occur with drunk driving, which is strictly outlawed and harshly enforced. For the same reasons, California needs laws that restrict the use of cell phones in cars.

Until we take action to pass new laws, drivers at least need to be more responsible when using cell phones. The American Automobile Association recommends that drivers pull off the road before using a cell phone, have a passenger use it for them, or use voice mail to answer calls. Another suggestion is to keep the phone off while moving or simply not use it in the car. Before using a cell phone, drivers should think to themselves, "Is this call really that important?"

Cell phones can be a vital link in emergencies, but drivers need to use them wisely. As professional NASCAR racer John Andretti says, "Driving safely is your first responsibility." The best road to safety is to just hang up and drive.