

Employees Are Using Their Phones While Driving Because They Think They Have To

A new study has found that many people who interact with their mobile phones while behind the wheel do so because of pressure from their bosses to answer calls, emails and text messages even if they are not on the clock.

Employers that pressure their staff to respond quickly to work-related messages and calls can be held partially liable for any accidents their employees cause due to distracted driving. While the employee's personal auto coverage would cover the cost of accidents they cause, if an incident results in serious injury or property damage, the injured third party may go for deeper pockets, like your business.

According to the report by The Travelers Companies, almost nine in 10 business managers expect their employees to at least occasionally respond to work-related phone calls and texts outside traditional office hours. A third of them expect employees to take or participate in work phone calls while they're driving.

Unsurprisingly, drivers who want to keep their jobs and the accompanying paychecks try to please the boss. Forty-two percent of drivers take work calls and read work texts and e-mails while driving, according to the report. Of those who do:

- More than 40% say it's because there may be an emergency at work.
- 39% believe they must always be available for their employers.
- Just under 20% believe their bosses will become upset if they don't answer.

Another study found that 86% of people who drive for their jobs had used a mobile device for work purposes while driving during the prior three months. An astounding 29% participated in video calls while driving.

These behaviors put the health and lives of the drivers at risk, along with those of their passengers and the motorists with whom they share the road. In addition to unnecessary pain and suffering, resulting accidents can incur thousands or even millions of dollars in legal liabilities for the drivers and their employers.

Some solutions to the problem are in the hands of policymakers and manufacturers of autos and mobile devices. These include:

- Requiring advanced safety technologies in new vehicles;
- Phone features that disable the device while the user is driving;
- Laws against using mobile devices while driving, with steep penalties for violations; and
- State driver tests that include questions about the dangers of distracted driving.

What to do

Employers can also take action, such as:

- Including in their employee handbooks policies discouraging use of mobile devices while driving on company business;
- Making safe driving part of the company's culture so that employees will have an expectation that they must drive safely;
- Explicitly stating that no work phone call, e-mail or text message is so important that it cannot wait until the employee has parked their vehicle;
- Explicitly stating that no employee will be expected to participate in video calls while driving; and
- Discouraging managers from calling, texting or e-mailing employees outside of stated hours or when they know employees are driving.

In addition, employees should be told they can find safe places to stop their vehicles should they feel it necessary to check messages or respond to calls or texts. And they should be made to feel secure enough in their positions that they can also refuse to respond until they are safely parked.

Distracted driving causes avoidable, tragic accidents. These are bad enough when people make voluntary irresponsible decisions. They are worse when drivers feel they have no choice.

If employers and employees change their attitudes, they can make the highways safer for all.

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