

# We Need To Talk About Handsfree: Police officers should not give dangerous advice to drivers which puts their lives at risk



**WNTTAFH**  
WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT HANDS FREE

Prof Gemma Briggs, Dr Helen Wells & Dr Leanne Savigar-Shaw

## THE PROBLEM WITH PHONE USE

- If we want to reduce the harm caused by distracted driving, we need to educate police officers that advising people to use handsfree is dangerous advice and, as such, they should not be giving it to drivers.
- This is because handsfree phone use is just as distracting as handheld use, even though it is legal.
- Handheld and handsfree use BOTH increase crash risk, slow reaction times, and result in poor hazard detection.
- This is because the brain is still distracted, regardless of where the driver's hands are or where their eyes are

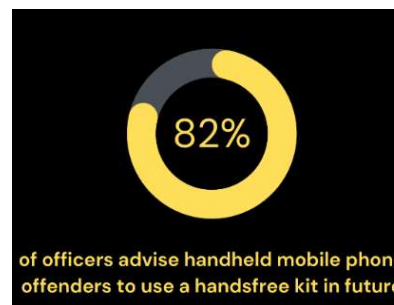
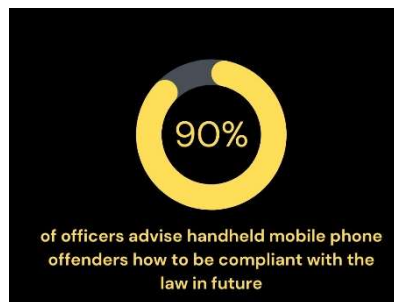
### HOW DOES PHONE USE AFFECT YOUR DRIVING?

**HAND HELD OR HANDS FREE PHONE USE CAUSES:**

- INCREASED CRASH RISK**  
YOU ARE 4 TIMES MORE LIKELY TO CRASH. THIS LASTS FOR UP TO 5 MINS AFTER PHONE USE HAS ENDED
- SLOWER REACTIONS**  
YOU CAN TAKE UP TO A SECOND LONGER TO REACT TO HAZARDS, INCREASING YOUR STOPPING DISTANCE
- POOR HAZARD DETECTION**  
YOU ARE FAR LESS LIKELY TO NOTICE HAZARDS – EVEN IF THEY HAPPEN RIGHT IN FRONT OF YOU
- LOOKING BUT NOT SEEING**  
AS YOUR ATTENTION SHIFTS BETWEEN TASKS YOU CAN LOOK AT A HAZARD BUT FAIL TO SEE IT

## BUT WHAT ABOUT THE LAW?

- The law suggests handsfree is a safe alternative to handheld, but this is wrong.
- If we agree that roads policing is about preventing deaths, and not just enforcing the law, then we need to stop officers from promoting the use of handsfree systems.
- Officers can absolutely use their discretion in choosing to prosecute or to educate, but they should not be advising drivers to do something lethal, even if it is currently legal.



Not convinced?  
Try this



## CHANGING MINDS, CHANGING PRACTICE

- The Transport Select Committee, Road Craft and Motorcycle Craft (the texts used to educate all emergency responders) and Driving For Better Business (part of National Highways) have all accepted the research findings and advise against handsfree phone use.
- Having experienced our educational intervention, 79% of officers said in future they would explain to offenders specifically why handsfree phone use is distracting.
- So, officers can be persuaded by the research findings. But they need to know that their senior officers are behind them.



The evidence shows that using a hands-free device creates the same risks of a collision as using a hand-held device, and it is therefore inappropriate for the law to condone it by omission....There needs to be a step change in the Government's approach to public education. If this is to successfully change public behaviour, it is important that the Government educates the public about why using a mobile phone while driving is dangerous.

TRANSPORT SELECT COMMITTEE

Road safety: driving while using a mobile phone: Recommendations, Aug 2019



“I welcome any research which progresses our understanding of risk and how it can be removed from our roads. This is a positive step forward in terms of preventing harm and reducing fatal and serious collisions. This work should be applauded and carefully considered by everyone who uses the roads”

Chief Constable Jo Shiner  
NPCC Lead for Roads Policing

# PHONE USE WHEN DRIVING: MYTH BUSTING

MYTH 	REALITY 
"HUMANS CAN EASILY DIVIDE THEIR ATTENTION"	 WE CAN'T DIVIDE OUR ATTENTION, WE SWITCH BETWEEN TASKS. THIS CAN DELAY REACTIONS
"HAND HELD PHONE USE IS DANGEROUS BUT HANDS FREE IS NOT"	 HANDS FREE IS NO SAFER THAN HAND HELD. DRIVERS ON THE PHONE ARE FOUR TIMES MORE LIKELY TO CRASH
"HANDS FREE IS THE SAME AS TALKING TO A PASSENGER"	 PASSENGERS CAN SEE WHAT A DRIVER CAN SEE AND CAN STOP TALKING. SOMEONE ON THE PHONE JUST KEEPS TALKING
"IF YOUR EYES ARE ON THE ROAD YOU CAN SPOT HAZARDS"	 DRIVERS ON THE PHONE CAN LOOK AT HAZARDS BUT FAIL TO SEE THEM

## GIVING GOOD ADVICE

- 91% of police officers we surveyed (411 participants) said they offer education on the dangers of phone use when they stop an offender. – THEY are giving advice, but it's about giving good advice...
- When they stop someone for handheld use, officers should not be recommending drivers try an alternative that could also kill them or someone else.
- It might be difficult to explain why handsfree is not safe, but we can predict what drivers might say and have given you some responses that should help.
- Alongside advice at the roadside, it's important to ensure other force comms are also 'on message' about why We Need To Talk About Handsfree.

## RESOURCES

- Wells et al (2021). The inconvenient truth about mobile phone distraction: Understanding the means, motive and opportunity for driver resistance to legal and safety messages. *The British Journal of Criminology*, 61(6), 1503-1520.
- Transport Select Committee Report. Road safety: driving while using a mobile phone. 12<sup>th</sup> report of Session 2017-2019, <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmtrans/2329/2329.pdf>
- Briggs et al (2023). Opinion: We need to talk about handsfree: Road Safety GB blog, <https://roadsafetygb.org.uk/news/opinion-we-need-to-talk-about-handsfree/>
- Briggs et al (2023) – We Need To Talk About Handsfree: Officer understanding of the dangers of handsfree and handheld mobile phone use by drivers. Report for The Road Safety Trust, [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1dZmhJfmDt0-O9Pds3kj\\_su-CMSFvfOUI/view?usp=drive\\_link](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1dZmhJfmDt0-O9Pds3kj_su-CMSFvfOUI/view?usp=drive_link)


Try our interactive activity



Are you a focused driver?

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You can find lots of resources and information on our website, including how to address challenges made by offenders.

