

Hands Free Cell Phones Required

By John Fossum, Rice County Attorney



Effective August 1, all Minnesotans will need to comply with the new Hands Free Cell phone law. Minnesota is one of 19 states to ban hand held use of phones, the District of Columbia does as well.

The Hands Free requirement recognizes that one in four crashes and one in five fatalities are caused by distracted driving. By putting down phones, drivers will be better able to focus on the road and on controlling their vehicles.

Hands Free does not ban all use of phones, only holding on to the phone. Drivers are encouraged to use Bluetooth or cables, or speaker phones if needed to make calls. Many newer vehicles have built in Bluetooth if yours does not, consider a Bluetooth earpiece. It has always been illegal for drivers to wear headphones or two earpieces, as this might prevent you from hearing a train, emergency vehicle, or other noises outside the car you should pay attention to. You may also use a wired headset with a microphone but again, only in one ear.

Video chats, looking at pictures, gaming or other distracting use of the phones remains illegal. Newer cars may have applications like Android Auto or Apple Carplay which makes it easy use your phone Hands Free. Many newer cars have auxiliary input jacks which would allow you to play the audio over your car's sound system. This would be useful for listening to music or navigation by phone. You might also look for an adapter that works with an FM radio or a cassette player depending on the equipment in your car.

If you use your phone for navigation, or to listen to music or podcasts, that is fine, but if the driver touches or holds the phone, you may be in violation of the law. Scrolling through playlists or media is also prohibited. Texting, calling, and all other smart phone uses must also be done Hands Free.

If your car does not have built-in navigation, it may be wise to invest in a holder which can display the phone where you can see it. Do not type while driving, voice recognition software on newer phones allows you to use most features without touching the phone.

Please plan ahead for August 1, avoid distracted driving and protect yourself and other drivers by obeying the Hands Free law. Use the available Hands Free technology, the voice activation on your phone, or a hard wire if needed. Do not type or swipe while driving. Instead focus your attention on the road ahead.

For more details and information on the Hands Free Law check out the Minnesota Safety Council's information on Hands Free at: minnesotasafetycouncil.org/traffic/handsfree. Be ready for August 1!