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Turn off

Evidence from a parliamentary road safety evidence session in July has underlined the persistent danger of drivers using mobile phones (www.is.gd/vunego). Mobile phone use contributed to 773 casualties, including 43 fatalities, in road traffic collisions in 2017.

Although statutory penalties increased that year (from three to six penalty points, and from £100 to £200 fine - with fines up to £2,500 for professional drivers, see p50), there is some evidence that enforcement has not kept pace, leading to complacency among drivers. They also stated that available evidence suggests that handsfree phones are no less distracting - and hence no safer - despite the fact that they are currently road legal. Similarly, using a device for non-communication tasks is also distracting.

This restriction runs counter to current technological trends in the age of connectivity. OEMs and suppliers are only too happy to enable that by continuing to develop the cockpit space with more sophisticated displays and communication platforms - cab bling. These are not mere toys; dispatch might well need to get in touch to provide a last-minute change of plan. And there are psychological motivations, too - most professional drivers lead a lonely life, isolated from others by a sheet metal cage.

In response, driver licence checking service provider Licence Bureau has argued that it's down to the fleet operator to set the right tone among drivers, in employment contracts. Its own driver policies ban the use of all mobiles, including handsfree, when driving. For drivers, this would mean that all of their communications - voice and data - would be restricted to breaks.

Bus, coach and heavy goods vehicle fleets should take the lead in fostering a culture of safety among drivers. Upon their behaviour depends the safety of all of the road users around them.

Did you notice the shortened URL above - www.is.gd/xxxxxx - which links to additional content? To reach that, type the whole link into the address window of your web browser. Do not enter the link into an internet search engine; that might lead to somewhere undesirable!

Will Dalrymple
Editor