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Coalition calls on mobile industry to cut driver distraction caused by phones

A group of road charities and organisations has today written to Android, Microsoft and the GSMA (Groupe Spéciale Mobile Association), urging them to include an 'opt out' driving mode as standard across mobile handsets. Technology to automatically prevent distracting alerts while driving, the coalition warns, is urgently needed to tackle "the needless deaths and serious injuries caused by drivers using handheld mobile phones behind the wheel".

The letter comes ahead of Apple's expected release this week of its iOS 11 system update, which will include a 'Do Not Disturb While Driving' mode that detects when someone is driving and turns off calls, text messages and notifications [1].

[Brake](#) and the [RAC's Be Phone Smart campaign](#), together with [Brighton and Hove City Council](#), the [Parliamentary Advisory Council on Transport Safety](#), [RED Driving School](#), [Road Safety GB](#) and [RoadPeace](#) have applauded the new iPhone feature as it can automatically prevent dangerous mobile phone distractions occurring in the first place.

In the letter, the coalition urges Android and Microsoft to follow suit, pledging to roll out an opt out driving mode in their next updates which will:

- Automatically, as a default setting, switch on when sensors in the handset detect the user is driving;
- Turn the screen blank and suspend any push notifications;
- Be able to send automatic replies via SMS to anyone contacting the user to inform them that they are driving;
- Only permit the handset to be used in conjunction with a hands-free device when enabled; and

- Provide evidence that the phone was in 'drive safe' mode – potentially leading to reduced insurance premiums.

The group says the illegal use of handheld mobile phones at the wheel is now at "epidemic proportions", with an estimated 11 million UK motorists admitting to making or receiving a call while driving and a shocking five million saying they have taken photos or videos while at the wheel of a moving vehicle [2].

Drivers using handsets when driving are four times more likely to be in a crash that causes injury [3], and reaction times, when using a mobile at the wheel, are a staggering 33 per cent slower than when driving after drinking at the maximum England and Wales drink drive limit [4]. Studies have also shown that the mere sound of a mobile phone ringing causes distraction and can increase the crash risk [5].

In 2015 - the latest year for which figures are available in Great Britain - Department for Transport statistics show that 22 people were killed and 99 were seriously injured in incidents where a driver was using their handheld phone behind the wheel [6]. However, there are likely to be many more crashes where the illegal use of a mobile phone was a contributory factor.

The coalition concludes its letter by stating that "no call, text or social media update is worth risking a life" and that the mobile phone industry has "a major part to play in reducing the distraction caused by phones in the car", reducing deaths and serious injuries across the globe.

Brake's Director of Campaigns, Jason Wakeford, said: "The illegal use of handheld mobile phones when driving is a growing menace and a major threat to road safety. Research shows that using a phone at the wheel affects reaction times as much as drink driving, increasing the chances of a crash.

"As a society, we have become addicted to our mobile phones, but a split second distraction caused by a call, text or notification behind the wheel can be deadly. The industry must play its part and include technology as standard which helps keep drivers' attention on the road, saving lives and preventing serious injuries."

RAC *Be Phone Smart* spokesman Pete Williams said: "Illegal handheld phone

use is one of the biggest in-car problems of our time and it will take a concerted effort to get the message across to drivers that it's simply not okay.

“We need organisations to work together and to come up with creative ways of helping drivers realise that no text or tweet while driving is worth the risk.

“Apple’s imminent iOS update is a major step forward and will mean that handsets used by millions of people will, for the first time, include in-built software that can reduce the distraction risk posed by handheld phones. Now we need the other major operating systems – Google’s Android and Microsoft’s Windows Mobile – to follow suit.”

Notes to Editors

[1] www.apple.com/uk/ios/ios-11-preview/

[2] RAC (2016) Snap, chat, text, tweet – anything goes at the wheel as motorists relax attitudes: www.rac.co.uk/press-centre#/pressreleases/snap-chat-text-tweet-anything-goes-at-the-wheel-as-motorists-relax-attitudes-1559464.

[3] University of Western Australia (2005) [Role of mobile phones in motor vehicle crashes resulting in hospital attendance: a case-crossover study](#).

[4] Transport Research Laboratory (2009) [Using a hands-free mobile whilst driving can be more dangerous than drink driving](#).

[5] Aston University (2012) [Influence of personal mobile phone ringing and usual intention to answer on driver error](#).

[6] Department for Transport (2015) Reported road casualties in Great Britain: www.gov.uk/government/statistics/reported-road-casualties-great-britain-annual-report-2015.

About the RAC

First formed in 1897 the RAC has been looking after the needs of its members and championing the interests of motorists for 120 years.

Today it has more than eight million members and is one of the UK's most progressive motoring organisations, providing services for both private and business motorists. Whether it's roadside assistance, insurance, buying a used car, vehicle inspections and checks, legal services or up-to-the-minute traffic and travel information – the RAC offers a solution for all motoring needs. The RAC is committed to making motoring easier, safer, more affordable and more enjoyable for drivers and road users.

The RAC is the motorist's champion and campaigns to support the interests of its members and UK motorists at a national level. This includes voicing concerns about the increasing cost of motoring, particularly the price of fuel and the high level of tax levied on it, advancing levels of road safety, and supporting the needs of all drivers, from young to old.

The RAC's annual [Report on Motoring](#) – first published in 1989 – provides a clear insight into the concerns and issues facing today's motorists.

For the very latest news on UK fuel prices, check [RAC Fuel Watch](#) or follow [#racfuelwatch on Twitter](#). RAC Fuel Watch is a comprehensive guide to the latest UK unleaded petrol and diesel prices – both at the wholesale level and at the pump. RAC Fuel Watch analyses how prices changed through the previous month and compares the most recent prices with those from three, six and 12 months before.

Key facts:

- RAC patrols fix four out of five vehicles at the roadside and on average within 30 minutes
- RAC vans carry more than 500 parts and tools to get members' vehicles going again
- 92% of members would recommend RAC Rescue to their friends and family

Contacts



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