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Illegal handheld mobile phone use at the wheel still rife

- **95% of motorists regularly see other drivers looking at their phones in stationary traffic**
- **Men more likely to make a call; women more likely to send a text**
- **RAC says time has come for the Government to fund a high profile public awareness advertising campaign**

The sight of drivers fiddling with handheld mobile phones at the wheel of their vehicles in standstill traffic has become so common place on Britain's roads that 95% of motorists now say they regularly see others doing it.

A survey of more than 2,000 drivers carried out by the RAC* reveals that illegal mobile phone use is still rife, with 64% of motorists saying that in the last hour they spent driving they saw at least one driver committing the offence. Of those, 6% claimed they saw between five and seven drivers breaking the law, whereas 36% witnessed one or two. Only 26% of motorists surveyed said they did not see anyone doing this.

Sixteen per cent of motorists questioned said on every journey they make they see others looking down as if they are interacting with their phones while stopped at traffic lights. The remaining 84% (of the 95%) who said they see this, do so less frequently.

But, even by their own admission, three in 10 motorists say they have used a handheld phone at the wheel; 29% claim they do it occasionally whilst the

other one per cent show utter contempt for the current law, which came into force 13 years ago, saying they use their handheld phones on most journeys.

The main reason cited by 61% of respondents for occasional phone use at the wheel was to make a short call. Half (49%) of those admitting to using a handheld phone when driving said they had checked email or text messages, and a similar percentage (47%) had sent a text message.

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While there is little difference in illegal phone use between male and female drivers; more men admit to using a handheld phone at the wheel than women (64% v 57%), whereas more women than men own up to sending a text (52% v 5%)

In age terms, almost a third of those surveyed (31%) say they see drivers of all ages committing the offence, but unsurprisingly the problem appears to be most prevalent in those under the age of 40 with 50% claiming they most frequently see drivers of this age group on their phones, either in a moving or stationary vehicle.

RAC spokesman Simon Williams said: “Thirteen years after the introduction of the current law forbidding use of a handheld phone at the wheel of a vehicle, this behaviour is far from being stamped out. In fact, the results of our research suggests the problem has got worse rather than better.

“The lack of a high profile advertising campaign similar to the ones targeting

drink-drivers and speeders has not helped, nor has the decline in the number of roads police officers as there is very little fear among offenders of being caught. As a society we need to change drivers' thinking to make them understand the serious consequences their decision to use their handheld phones can have. Using a hand held phone should be regarded as being as socially unacceptable as drinking and driving.

“There seems to be an unfortunate perception that a quick look at a phone at the traffic lights is okay. However, it is a significant distraction which at best may hold up other road users when a driver doesn't notice that the lights have changed, and at worst may increase the risk of a collision with a pedestrian, cyclist or another vehicle.”

“ [The Government is looking at increasing the penalties for using a handheld mobile phone at the wheel](#)**, and whilst this is welcome, there has to be a similar effort put in to enforcing these laws. Worryingly, the most recent [data indicates that the number of fixed penalty notices issued has declined](#). And, with illegal phone use at epidemic levels now is the time for the Government to find the money for a high impact public awareness advertising campaign.”

The RAC research also shows the strength of feeling about those who use their handheld phone at the wheel, with 76% believing offenders are putting other people's lives at risk and 60% saying they are 'selfish and irresponsible'.

Half (50%) of the drivers seen using a handheld phone at the wheel fortunately did not have any passengers in the vehicle, and only 29% were noticed carrying passengers. The remaining 21% of motorists could not recall whether the offending driver did or did not have anyone else in the vehicle.

The current fine for using a handheld mobile phone when driving is three penalty points and a £100 fine. The Government has just carried out a consultation on raising the fine to £150 and increasing the penalty points for non-HGV drivers from three to four.

ENDS

* Research carried out with 2,120 members of the RAC Opinion Panel from 31 March to 8 April 2016

** For the RAC's response to this consultation, please see check the [Research and Policy section](#) of this website

Notes to Editors

About the RAC

With more than eight million members, the RAC 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, including advancing levels of road safety, supporting the needs of young drivers and voicing concerns about the increasing cost of motoring. 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](#). This 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

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