RAC
Media Centre

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Mar 25, 2022 09:00 GMT

Majority of drivers unconvinced that strengthened laws on handheld mobile phone use at the wheel will make the roads safer

On the day drivers face six penalty points and a £200 fine if they are caught using a handheld phone at the wheel for virtually any reason after a loophole in the law was closed, new RAC research shows four-in-10 (43%) aren't aware of the changes being introduced and just 2% believe it will be very effective in improving driver behaviour.

Before today, a loophole existed where drivers might only receive a maximum of three penalty points and a £100 fine for using a handheld phone for actions that didn't involve any form of telecommunication – for instance, for scrolling through music playlists or taking a photo or video. In November 2021, the Government confirmed that the law would be toughened to ensure almost any use of a handheld phone would be punishable with six points and a £200 fine.

While most of the 2,000 drivers surveyed by the RAC (75%) are fully supportive of the change in the law, many are sceptical as to how effective it will be in getting offending drivers to change their behaviour and make the roads safer. Just 2% of drivers said they thought it will be 'very effective', with 49% thinking it would be 'partly effective' and a similar proportion – 45% – saying it won't be effective.

Of those who have concerns the roads won't be made safer by the changes that come in today, 86% say that it's because some drivers will always persist in using a phone illegally regardless of the law, while seven-in-10 (70%) say the problem is drivers don't feel they're likely to get caught in the first place. Nearly three-in-10 (28%) fear not enough will be done to let drivers know about the changes.

When it comes to what drivers think needs to be done to reduce the number of people using a handheld phone illegally at the wheel, drivers are split. Almost equal proportions believe that more visible police enforcement (23%), a high-profile advertising campaign (24%) and even tougher laws (26%) – such as the threat of a driver losing their licence altogether if caught. A fifth meanwhile (20%) would like to see cameras used to catch drivers acting illegally.

RAC spokesperson Rod Dennis:

"It's clear that most drivers are supportive of the law being strengthened to make it easier to prosecute drivers who put lives at risk by using a handheld phone – after all, using a phone to take a photo or look at a playlist is at least as distracting as using it to talk or text.

"But while we welcome today's law change and very much hope it will make a difference, it's arguable that it will only be truly effective if it's rigorously enforced. If some drivers still don't feel they're likely to be caught, then

simply making the law tougher isn't going to have the desired effect of making our roads safer. That explains why such a tiny proportion of drivers – just 2% - think the new changes will be very effective in changing behaviour.

"The dial really needs to be turned up when it comes to enforcement, and that means police forces having the resources and technology they need to more easily catch those drivers that continue to flout the law. Cameras that can automatically detect handheld phone use exist and are in use in other countries, so we think it's high time the UK Government evaluated this technology with a view to allowing police forces to deploy it at the earliest opportunity."

Previous research for the RAC Report on Motoring found that more than one-in-10 younger drivers admitted to taking a photo or video while driving, while 6% said they had played a game on a handheld phone while at the wheel.**

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* Research conducted by the RAC among 2,000 UK drivers between 18 and 21 March 2022

** Source: RAC Report on Motoring

The press office email address is press.enquiries@rac.co.uk and media centre is at media.rac.co.uk. **Please note:** the press office is unable to help with individual customer enquiries - please visit the RAC contacts page to find the right contact.

About the RAC

The RAC, an iconic UK brand, provides complete peace of mind to 13 million UK private and business drivers, whatever their motoring needs. As well as its premium nationwide breakdown assistance service – with an expert branded patrol workforce attending more than two million breakdowns every year – it offers a wide range of market-leading products across insurance, legal services, vehicle inspections and service, maintenance and repair. The RAC is also at the forefront in helping drivers make the switch to electric vehicles

and leads in the development of new solutions for businesses and OEMs, partnering with the best in the motoring and mobility space.

Visit the RAC website.

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