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Motorists want more severe penalties for illegal mobile phone use

Almost a third of motorists think increasing the penalty will not change driver behaviour

With the outcome of a [Government consultation on increasing the penalties for illegal phone use when driving](#) due to be published imminently, new RAC research* has found that half of motorists believe the current penalty combination of a fine and points should be more severe.

Fifty-two per cent of the 2,100 motorists surveyed felt the standard penalty of three penalty points and a fine of £100 for drivers caught using a handheld mobile phone at the wheel should be increased. Forty-one per cent, however, believed it is already set at the correct level.

But significantly, nearly a third (31%) say that increasing the severity of the penalty will not make any difference at all in changing the behaviour of those motorists who are prepared to break the law in this way.

Among the 52% of motorists who feel the penalty for illegal phone use should be increased, a fifth (21%) think both the number of penalty points and the fine should be raised. Twelve per cent said just the fine should be increased, whereas 6% stated that only the points should be.

For 11% though, disqualification from driving is the answer, with the majority of those (52%) justifying this by saying that this is the only deterrent likely to make a difference. It's no wonder then, that more than two-thirds of the motorists surveyed (68%) wish there were more police officers around to catch offenders. The survey highlighted that many respondents had strong views: 76% believe offenders are putting other people's lives at risk and 60%

say those using a hand-held phone whilst driving are 'selfish and irresponsible'.

Of those who believe the offence ought to carry a higher fine, 61% think it should be at least £200 and over a third (36%) believe it should be at least £450. And, amongst those who feel the offence should carry more penalty points, 61% said it should be six points and 14% were in favour of more than six penalty points.

The Government's consultation on raising the fine from £100 to £150 and increasing the penalty points for non-HGV drivers from three to four closed on 15 March and its response is due to be published imminently.

More than a quarter (27%) of motorists asked by the RAC about the proposed Department for Transport changes said they are a good idea, but a majority (69%) said they will not make any difference as a substantial minority will still use their hand-held phones while driving.

The consultation was also seeking feedback on a proposal to increase penalty points from three to six for those that hold a large goods vehicle (HGV) licence and commit the offence whilst driving an HGV.

Fifty-eight per cent of those surveyed think this is a good idea and, in this instance, only 38% don't think it will make any difference whatsoever.

RAC spokesman Simon Williams said: "There is a very strong feeling from law-abiding motorists that something needs to be done to make drivers stop using their phones while driving. But while people want the penalties for committing this offence to be beefed up there is also an acceptance that nothing is likely to change due primarily to a lack of enforcement.

"From 2010 to 2015 England and Wales experienced a 27% decline in the number of roads police officers. The number of fixed penalty notices issued for using a handheld phone while driving reduced dramatically from a high of 125,500 in 2009 to 52,400 in 2012. In line with this, our own research has found that motorists believe there is little chance of being caught by a police officer (as opposed to a camera) for a driving offence.

"In the 13 years since specific legislation was introduced making it illegal to

use a handheld phone while driving, mobile phones have evolved into smartphones, and the increased features offered by apps and faster internet access has raised interaction among users to near addiction levels. While being glued to the screen of a mobile phone when walking is dangerous enough, doing the same thing at the wheel of a vehicle, even just occasionally is a recipe for disaster.

“Changing this behaviour will only come through a combination of actions. We need more rigorous enforcement of the law, increased penalties that act as a meaningful deterrent and a high profile advertising campaign that makes motorists fully aware of the serious consequences of using a handheld phone at the wheel of a vehicle.”

Notes to Editors

* Research carried out with 2,120 members of the RAC Opinion Panel.

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

Contacts



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