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Prosecutions for motorists using a mobile phone at the wheel fall by half in five years

Fewer than 18,000 prosecutions made in 2014

Drop despite at least as many motorists using a phone illegally in 2014 as in 2009

Commons' Transport Committee to open inquiry into of road traffic law enforcement effectiveness

Fewer motorists are being prosecuted for using their mobile phone while driving than ever before, according to official figures seen by the RAC – with prosecutions down by 47% between 2009 and 2014.*

The fall comes despite figures from the Department for Transport** showing a persistent number of drivers are still using their phone at the wheel – highlighting a worrying mismatch between what motorists see happening on our roads and what drivers are being prosecuted for.

A motorist caught using a mobile phone is most likely to receive a fixed penalty notice (FPN) from a police officer, as there is currently no technology in use by police forces that automatically detects illegal use. [Between 2011 and 2013, the number of FPNs handed to drivers dropped from 123,100 to 52,400 – a fall of 57%.](#)

New figures show prosecutions for offences related to mobile phone use at the wheel have also fallen sharply. In 2014, 17,414 prosecutions were made in magistrates’ courts in England and Wales, which is 15,157 fewer than in 2009. A motorist may be summoned to a magistrates’ court if they ignore or choose to challenge a fixed penalty notice, if they already carry too many points, or if the offence is deemed too serious for a fixed penalty.

*Offenders cautioned and defendants proceeded against at magistrates’ courts for offences related to driving while using a mobile phone, England and Wales**

	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009	Change: 2009 to 2014
Proceeded against	17,414	19,650	24,414	31,390	35,255	32,571	-47%
Found guilty	16,012	17,472	22,135	28,969	32,547	30,182	-47%
% found guilty	92%	89%	91%	92%	92%	93%	

The fall is despite figures from the Department for Transport indicating a relatively unchanged percentage of car drivers using phones at the wheel. A study in 2014 found that 1.6% of all drivers in England – that is more than half a million people – were observed using a mobile phone, slightly up from

1.4% in 2009.**

Mobile phone use is increasingly a contributory factor in accidents in the UK – [in 2014, 492 accidents were as a result of a driver using a phone, up 40% on 2010.](#)

The findings chime with research conducted for this year's Report on Motoring, which found [over a third of motorists \(34%\) rank the dangers of drivers using a phone to talk, text or use the internet as one of their top concerns](#) – unchanged on 2014 figures.

RAC head of external affairs Pete Williams said: “There is still an enormous gulf between what the law states – that handheld mobile phones should not be used behind the wheel – and what motorists see happening on our roads. Drivers are routinely using their phones at red traffic lights, or even while on the move.

“We have already highlighted the large reductions in the numbers of full-time roads policing officers affecting many police forces. [On average across the country there was a 23% cut between 2010 and 2014 – meaning there are 1,279 fewer officers patrolling our roads.](#) Sadly, therefore, there are now far fewer police to enforce a law that is designed to protect all road users and pedestrians.

“With budgetary constraints, roads policing officer numbers are not going to dramatically increase in the near future, but we believe that now is time to halt the decline and stop further year-on-year cuts. We also look to the Government to propose other means of enforcing the existing law. Can technology play a greater role in helping catch offenders?

“Is there also a role for a national public awareness campaign on the dangers of using a phone at the wheel, similar to the hard-hitting campaigns which have helped stigmatise drink-driving?

“The goal for ministers and policymakers is surely to make the use of mobile phones at the wheel as socially unacceptable as drink-driving. With this the number one road safety concern for motorists, coupled with official data showing fewer people are being caught, there will be an overwhelming frustration that too many drivers are simply getting away with it.”



[Watch video on YouTube here](#)

The Commons' Transport Committee is due to hear evidence this month as part of an inquiry into the effectiveness of road traffic law enforcement – see www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/transport-committee/news-parliament-2015/launch-road-traffic-law-enforcement-15-16/.

Legislation was introduced in December 2003 making it illegal to use a hand-held mobile phone whilst driving or riding a motor vehicle on the road. Currently, drivers caught receive three points on their licence and a £100 fine.

Notes to Editors

* 2014 figures provided by Andrew Selous MP on 14 September 2015 in response to parliamentary question from Gareth Thomas MP: www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2015-09-04/8713. Figures for 2009 to 2013 inclusive: http://qna.files.parliament.uk/qna-attachments/177562/original/PQ223162+_tables.xls

** DfT 'Seat belt and mobile phone use surveys: England and Scotland, 2014': www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/406723/seatbelt-and-mobile-use-surveys-2014.pdf. 31.8 million estimated driving licence holders in the UK: www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-

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.

The RAC supports and is a founding member of [FairFuelUK](#) which campaigns for fairer taxes on petrol and diesel.

Key facts:

- RAC patrols fix four out of five vehicles at the roadside and on average within 34 minutes
- RAC vans carry more than 500 parts and tools to get members' vehicles going again
- 98% of members would recommend RAC Rescue to their friends and family

Contacts



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