

Conn. pols weigh updates to reflect GPS advances

April 19 2009, By STEPHANIE REITZ , Associated Press Writer



In this March 17, 2009 photo, GPS units are on sale at Bernie's, a chain in Newington, Conn. The Connecticut General Assembly's transportation committee has endorsed updates in laws that currently bar drivers from having video display screens in their line of sight. The updated laws would exempt GPS navigation units, rear-view video backup monitors and similar factory installed devices. The store's assistant manager, Kamarley Headley, stands behind the counter. (AP Photo/Bob Child)

(AP) -- Addicted to that GPS navigation system? On Connecticut roads, that might make you a lawbreaker.

With technology often moving more quickly than bureaucracy, state legislators are updating laws that bar drivers from having video display screens within their line of sight.

The laws, originally intended to prevent distractions from televisions and video devices, went into effect before the proliferation of portable [GPS](#) navigation units. But because their screens include moving images beyond simply text, they technically could be interpreted as violating the [law](#) - though police say they certainly are not lurking with their ticket books to spot and cite GPS users.

"They certainly are a fact of life on our roads and do require a certain amount of attention, but I don't think they're terribly distracting as long as drivers are responsible about it," said state police spokesman Lt. J. Paul Vance.

Under current law, Connecticut drivers cannot have moving video images within their view. That bars them from watching portable televisions, DVD players, video iPods and other devices.

The General Assembly's transportation committee endorsed updates in March to specifically exempt navigation units, rearview backup video monitors and similar factory-installed devices as long as they are used properly.

The updates require full General Assembly approval before taking effect.

State legislatures throughout the U.S. have struggled with the challenge of anticipating technology as they update their laws. It's led to a proliferation of cell phone use restrictions over the years, along with laws to ban text-messaging on phones and similar devices while driving.

The original laws on in-car video displays stemmed from increasing reports in the late 1990s and current decade about drivers being caught watching movies on their laptop computers and portable DVD players. Some also have had video screens set up within their line of sight so they could watch whatever their back seat passengers were enjoying during the ride.

"Over the years we've seen it all, honestly," Vance said. "With the evolution of technology going so quickly, the possibilities are really almost endless."

Generally, though, drivers using GPS navigation units rely as much - or more - on spoken directions as on the slow-moving graphic maps on their screens.

Connecticut's experience is not unique.

"The technology is, and always has, moved very fast," said Ann Teigen, a transportation policy specialist for the National Conference of State Legislatures. "Legislatures are having to always keep up on what the newest technology is, and to keep that in mind when they're writing their laws."

Illinois, Louisiana, California and several other states already specifically exclude GPS devices from rules prohibiting television and [video](#) displays, according to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. Others states - Kentucky, Mississippi and Ohio, for instance - have no specific law on the displays but can regulate them under broader safety regulations.

Connecticut sits in a gray area. The current law allows "instrumentation," a word that some people may interpret to include GPS and factory-installed displays - and other people, lacking specific wording to that

effect, may dispute.

State Rep. Antonio Guerrero said lawmakers want to clear it up once and for all - if that's even possible in this time of rapidly evolving technology.

"I said three years ago that by now the manufacturers will be coming out with cars that you can talk directly to, and that's exactly what some of them are doing now," he said.

©2009 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.

Citation: Conn. pols weigh updates to reflect GPS advances (2009, April 19) retrieved 4 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-04-conn-pols-gps-advances.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.