

Action urged to deal with handheld phone use in cars

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Strong action is urged to tackle the growing problem of handheld phone use and texting while driving, according to a viewpoint published in the March 6 issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

(HealthDay)—Strong action is urged to tackle the growing problem of handheld phone use and texting while driving, according to a viewpoint published in the March 6 issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

Noting that from 2005 to 2009 there was a 22 percent increase in [motor vehicle crash](#) fatalities associated with [driver distraction](#), Jeffrey H. Coben, M.D., and Motao Zhu, M.D., Ph.D., from West Virginia University in Morgantown, examined the educational and legislative efforts to reduce handheld phone use and texting while driving.

The authors note that the likelihood of a safety-critical event is six times higher for drivers dialing a cell phone and 23 times higher for those

texting compared with drivers not using cell phones while driving. Despite legislation banning and restricting cell phone use and texting while driving, in a nationwide survey, 40 percent of respondents reported talking on the phone, and 13 percent reported texting while driving. Educational efforts, while important, are unlikely to affect behavioral change. Legislation is unlikely to be a deterrent while law enforcement personnel do not enforce it. Technological solutions are suggested to prevent handheld devices from being operable when a car is in motion. The [National Highway Traffic Safety Administration](#) has issued nonbinding guidelines, which are unlikely to have a real effect on the problem.

"Strong and courageous action is needed to effectively deal with the problem of cell phone use while driving. Education, legislation, and voluntary guidelines are insufficient," the authors write. "In this era of smartphones and [smart cars](#), it is time to be smarter about keeping them apart from one another."

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