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## Teen Drivers Banned From Using Mobile Phones in California

The law bans teenagers from using an electronic device, such as cell phones, pagers, laptops, and handheld computers, while behind the wheel.

By Antone Gonsalves, [InformationWeek](#)

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Starting next summer, California teenagers can be fined for talking on their mobile phones while driving.

Signed into law Thursday by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, the bill by Democratic state Sen. Joe Simitian bans teenagers from using an electronic device, such as cell phones, pagers, laptops, and handheld computers, while behind the wheel. Violators would be fined \$20 for the first offense, and \$50 for each additional offense.

The law takes effect on July 1, 2008, the same day that a law requiring all drivers to use hands-free devices while talking on cell phones takes effect. The second law carries the same fines, and both provide exemptions for emergency calls.

The law targeting teens is tougher than the hands-free legislation because supporters believe teens are too inexperienced to multi-task while driving, "The simple fact is that teenage drivers are more easily distracted," Schwarzenegger [said in a statement](#). "They are young, inexperienced, and have a slower reaction time. We want to eliminate any extra distractions so they can focus on paying attention to the road and being good drivers."

Cell phone use is a leading cause of distracted-driver accidents in the state, according to the California Highway Patrol. Car crashes in general are the leading cause of death among 16 to 20 year olds, accounting for 44% of teen deaths in the U.S. About 6,000 teenage drivers or passengers die each year in car crashes.

While representing 6.3% of the nation's licensed drivers, teenagers account for 13.6% of fatal crashes, according to the governor's office. A 2004 study showed that drivers age 16 to 19 have a fatality rate that's four times the rate of drivers 25 to 69.

Fifteen states and the District of Columbia ban the use of wireless communication devices by new and inexperienced drivers. The National Transportation Safety Board has urged all states to adopt such prohibitions.

Not all studies, however, agree on the dangers of driving while using a cell phone. A [recent study](#) by two University of California, Berkeley, graduate students found no correlation between mobile phone use during weekday evening driving and car crashes. The American Enterprise Institute for Regulatory Studies published the findings.



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