CELL PHONE SAFETY ALERT

There are over 117 million cell phone subscribers in the United States. Prohibiting the use of these cell phones on the road has been a controversial debate for the Rhode Island legislature as well as neighboring states. Diverting your attention from driving to your cellular phone puts you and those around you at a greater risk of being involved in a collision. The only way to diminish this hazard is to eliminate the use of cell phones while behind the wheel.

As convenient as cellular technology is, there are safety concerns associated with its use as well. According to the New England Journal of Medicine, the risk of a collision when using a cellular phone is four times higher than when the phone is not in use, making it as dangerous as driving while intoxicated.

Why are so many drivers talking on the phone? The positives to cell phone usage include: the ability to conduct business outside the office; the ability to call for help in an emergency or to call for roadside assistance; and the ability to stay in touch with colleagues.

Despite their numerous benefits, cell phones can pose a serious risk. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has determined that driver distraction is a primary or contributing factor in as many as 50% of all traffic collisions. This statistic is supported by the fact that cell phone users spend over half their time on their phones while driving. Studies done by the National Safety Council have shown that phone conversations result in slower response to traffic signals, as well as increasing the likelihood of missing a signal.

Despite popular belief, using a hands-free cell phone is proven to be just as dangerous as a hand-held cell phone. Promoting the use of hands-free sets will only encourage employees to drive and talk. Employers should take a proactive approach by prohibiting the use of cellular phones by employees while driving.

Do you have a company policy regarding cell phone usage?

If yes, are the employees;

- Given training on cell phone safety?
- Informed of the potential safety and health risks associated with driving and talking?
- Instructed to only use the phone if it is absolutely necessary?
- Instructed to pull over in a safe, secure place to make or take a call?
- Required to inform the person on the other end that they will return the call when they arrive at their destination?
- Required to sign a form acknowledging that they understand the company policies on safe cell phone use?

The use of cell phones while driving continues to be a growing debate for local and state legislation. Currently there are three states that prohibit the use of hand held cell phones while driving. They are: Connecticut, New Jersey, and New York. Many other States have restrictions for bus drivers and teens.