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Hands-Free Phone Kits Help Reduce Cell Phone Distraction

Whether it's Back-to-School or Labor Day Traffic, Drivers Need to Focus on Driving and Minimize Distractions

AUSTIN, TX (Aug 30, 2006) -- It's August and the annual back-to-school migration has begun. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 75 million students of all ages will be heading to school in the next few weeks. Additionally, AAA estimates 35 million people will travel more than 50 miles from home over the Labor Weekend

This means heavy traffic everywhere – from supermarket parking lots and neighborhood streets to the nation's roads and freeways.

One thing they all these drivers will have in common: They will be concerned with a lot more than simply driving. And that is a concern in itself.

Driver Distraction Causes Accidents

A landmark study released this spring by the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute documented that 80% of traffic accidents are caused by driver distraction and that young drivers were four times more likely to be involved in a crash. The study showed that about 65 percent of near-crashes stemmed from driver inattention in the three seconds before the event.

Reaching for a moving object was the most dangerous -- a coffee mug rolling around or searching for a cell phone on the floor or map in the back seat. It makes a driver nine times more likely to be in a crash or near-crash. Putting makeup on makes drivers three times more likely to be in accident, which is slightly more dangerous than dialing a cell phone – except for teenagers whose distraction level while talking on the cell phone far exceeds that of adults.

Young Drivers at Most Risk

The increasing use of cell phones while driving is a major concern. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) reports that at any time of day 6 percent of drivers on U.S. roads in 2005 were using hand-held phones — double the rate that was observed 5 years ago. The highest phone use rate in 2005 (10 percent) was among drivers 16 to 24 years old.

“It's troubling that the youngest drivers are the most likely to be talking on phones,” says Anne McCartt, vice president-research, Insurance Institute of Highway Safety. “These drivers already have higher crash rates than older drivers, including higher fatal crash rates, and the last thing they need is the distraction of using a phone.”

The Institute says that accidents may increase with cell phone use because drivers are more likely to take their hands off the steering wheel or their eyes off the road when they are dialing a phone or answering it.

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Reflecting the growing concern about cell phones, cities and states are scrambling to impose restrictions on cell phone use by drivers. It is illegal to use a hand-held phone while driving in Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, the District of Columbia and in Chicago. Ten states and DC limit the use of any kind of phone by teenage drivers, and the limit applies to school bus drivers in 11 states and DC.

Hands-free Devices More Popular

To reduce distraction and comply with the new laws, consumers are more rapidly choosing wireless, *Bluetooth*® hands-free devices that allow them to use their phones without having to hold them and manufacturers' growing sales figures bear this out.

"Our month over month sales continue to climb reflecting a growing need for consumers to make a smart choice while driving," says Edward Valdez, president and COO of Parrot, Inc., a leading innovator of *Bluetooth* hands-free mobile phone car kits. "Drivers need to keep their eyes on the road and hands on the wheel and our hands-free car kits help them do that."

Essentially, there are four types of hands-free devices motorists can use with a *Bluetooth*-enabled cell phone. The best ones feature true voice recognition technology that allows you to make and take phone calls with voice commands. The four types are:

- Plug-and-play devices that plug into the vehicle's 12-volt accessory outlet and have an integrated speaker like the Parrot EasyDrive
- Wireless headsets which people use both in and out of their vehicle. Parrot makes a light-weight device (less than 1 ounce) that comes with its own charging cradle which plugs into the vehicle 12-volt accessory plug so it's always fully charged.
- A speaker-phone device that clips to your driver-side sun visor.
- A professionally-installed car kit that is integrated into your vehicle sound system and works through its speakers. With six car kits in its line, Parrot currently has the broadest portfolio and will be introducing two new models this fall.

The latter is the best solution because it takes advantage of the vehicle's audio system which automatically mutes the music for an incoming call and has superior audio quality.

For frequent travelers who use rental cars -- or if they want to use a hands-free device in multiple vehicles -- a plug-and-play device may be a better solution.

Car Kit Features to Consider

Depending on the model selected, installed car kits like those from Parrot come with an LCD display that shows caller I.D. and the cell phone directory; some even have a GPS antenna that broadcasts the driver's location to the display on a smartphone, PDA or laptop. Some car kits hold up to 1000 contacts and take 150 voice tags which allow the use of voice commands to make and take calls.

Car kits range in price from about \$50 on the basic entry-level *Bluetooth* headset, to about \$400 for a full-featured car kit with installation. They can be found at national and regional mobile electronics retailers like Fry's, Abt Electronics in Chicago, Tweeter, Al & Ed's in California, and online at many sites such as www.crutchfield.com, www.carkits.com, www.amazon.com or www.mobileplanet.com.

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With the wide availability and price range of hands-free devices, there's really no excuse to keep juggling a phone while driving – or trying to drive while you hold it between your head and shoulder. The distraction of dialing a cell phone while driving – or searching for it when it falls on the floor – can put you, your passengers and others at serious risk as accident research has shown.

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About Parrot

A member of Bluetooth SIG since June 2000, Parrot (www.parrot.biz) is a leader in Bluetooth mobile phone accessories with over 1.5 million products sold. The company has developed extensive expertise in voice recognition and digital signal processing both in hardware and software. Parrot's focus is to provide the natural extension of mobile phones in three key areas: hands-free communication, audio streaming, and digital photos. Founded in 1994 by Henri Seydoux, Parrot is a global company headquartered in Paris and is traded on Euronext. The company has offices in Germany, Italy, Spain, UK, US and Hong Kong/China. U.S. offices are in New York, Detroit and Austin, Texas. Parrot products are sold online and through retail stores in more than 40 countries. Parrot and the Parrot logo are trademarks of Parrot S.A. The *Bluetooth*® word mark and logos are owned by the Bluetooth SIG, Inc. and any use of such marks by Parrot is under license. Other trademarks and trade names are those of their respective owners. For more information call 1-877-PARROT or visit www.parrot.biz.

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