

Plan studied to make car phone kits compulsory

RTA launches year-long road safety drive telling motorists to use instruments equipped with hands-free devices

- By Ashfaq Ahmed, Chief Reporter
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Dubai: Motorists may soon be required to install hands-free mobile phone kits in their vehicles as part of the campaign to reduce road accidents related to the use of cell phones while driving.

"We may resort to strict rules with heavier fines if drivers continue to use phones without hands-free kits in violation of the traffic laws," said Sultan Al Marzouqi, Director of the Licensing Department at the Dubai Roads and Transport Authority (RTA). He added the RTA would consider the proposal to make hands-free kits mandatory in the car at the time of registration.

Also, he said insurance companies would be asked to give incentives or discounts to car owners with hands-free devices in their cars.

Al Marzouqi spoke to reporters yesterday at a press conference at the Dubai Press Club where a 12-month road safety campaign was launched.

M.P. Sharman, president of Nokia Techmart, and Chris Braam, vice-president for sales, Nokia Middle East and Africa, were also present.

The RTA has partnered with Nokia for the awareness campaign to encourage drivers to follow safety standards. Al Marzouqi said that UAE laws prohibit drivers from using mobile phones without hands-free devices while driving. Offenders stand to be fined Dh200 and given four black points. He said authorities are not strict in implementing the law. However, he noted an increase in the number of offenders fined for violating the regulation.

The police have also reported a 25 per cent reduction in the number of people killed on Dubai roads.

Nonetheless, Al Marzouqi is battling for stricter penalties as many drivers continue to violate the law, putting the lives of other road users at risk.

Al Marzouqi noted that another common and very dangerous use of a mobile phone by young and inexperienced drivers is to read or write text messages while driving. "This practice is most dangerous because they are driving with only one hand on the steering wheel and their attention and eyes are not on the road," he said.

Attention grabber

Nokia Techmart's Braam said that using mobile phones and other devices that take a driver's attention away from the road reduce the driver's ability to manoeuvre the vehicle.

He cited studies that show that having a phone conversation while driving can cause a significant distraction to the driver. "This collaboration sets an example of how regulatory figures and service providers can work hand in hand to accomplish results," he said.

Safety measures

- Use a phone holder to secure the phone in the car and be sure the placement of the phone holder does not obscure the driver's view of the road.
- Set up the phone in the car before you start driving.
- Use a voice-activated phone system.
- Delay phone conversations when driving or have only short, casual phone conversations while driving.
- Stop the vehicle for complex or emotional phone conversations.
- Never play games on a mobile phone or read or send text messages while driving.
- Never use a mobile phone without a hands free kit while driving.