

NEW LAW EFFECTIVE OCTOBER 1

Effective October 1, using a hand-held cell phone while operating a motor vehicle on a street or highway in Maryland is prohibited. Phone calls placed to 911, ambulance, hospital, fire or law-enforcement agencies are permitted, as are calls made by emergency and law-enforcement personnel. NOTE: Drivers under the age of 18 already are prohibited from using cell phones while driving.

The fine for the first offense is \$40 and subsequent offenses are \$100. Points are not assessed to the first-time violator's driving record, except three points are assessed if the violation contributes to a crash. If a violator has a second or subsequent offense, he or she receives one point plus the fine.

The new law is a secondary offense -- a driver must first be detained for another offense, such as speeding or negligent driving, before he or she can be ticketed for a cell phone offense. Negligent driving IS a primary offense in Maryland and can be used as a precursor to citing violators of the new cell phone law.

The National Safety Council estimates that cell phone use is responsible for 1.6 million crashes a year, nationally -- about 28 percent of all crashes. Maryland now joins seven other states (Calif., Conn., Del., N.J., N.Y., Ore. and Wash.), Washington D.C. and the Virgin Islands in banning hand-held cell phone use while driving. For more information, please visit www.distraction.gov.