

at your Service

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Don't hold the phone

North Americans, in general, are in love with two things: their automobile and their cellphone. Unfortunately, the two don't mix very well.

Lately, the media has been rife with horror stories about cellphones and driving. Like the Toronto yakker who smacked into a police car after being pulled over for speeding. Or the Kings County RCMP officer who says drivers talking on cellphones are often oblivious when he pulls up behind them with lights and siren on.

A recent poll noted that a vast majority of Nova Scotians think people who talk on cellphones while they drive are dangerous. Reports by leading organizations and publications such as the Insurance Corporation of British Columbia, the Canada Safety Council, Université de Montréal and *The Canadian Medical Journal* concur that using a cellphone while driving is not safe.

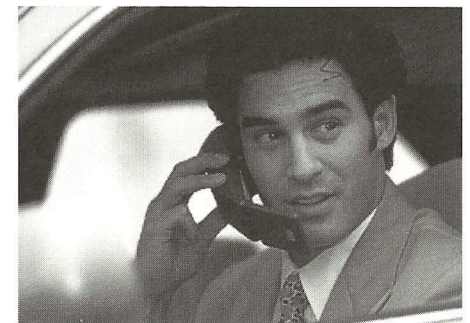
Still, hard data is difficult to come by. Investigating police officers record when a collision is caused by driver inattention but they do not specify the source of the

distraction. The driver may have been talking on a cell. Or eating. Or talking to a passenger. Or sightseeing.

"Cellphones are a relatively new issue on the driver safety front and they're just part of the issue," says Paul Arsenault, Director, Driver and Vehicle Safety. "To get a more complete picture, you need to include laptop and handheld computers, CB radios, car radios, tape and CD players, video games, TVs..."

While the issue has largely been framed as a personal safety topic, like seat belts in cars and helmets on cyclists, there's more to it than that. There could be a workplace aspect that is a grey area indeed.

Consider this: If you were driving your own car to a meeting related to your job and you got into an accident while calling ahead to get directions, is that a workplace accident? Same scenario, but the caller is a friend. Would you be considered in a workplace at the time of the accident? If you hit another car, can the owner sue the government if you're deemed to be in a workplace?



Does it matter if you're using a government issue cellphone or your own phone for a business call; whether you file a travel claim or get reimbursed for talk time on your personal phone?

Paul Arsenault is currently leading a task force with members from several departments that will recommend safety guidelines and corporate policy for government workers who use cellphones. The big issue seems to be determining when this technology is a "need to have" rather than a "nice to have", acknowledging that different departments have different criteria about who qualifies for a cellphone. See **Phone** cont'd on page 2

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