

FAQS ABOUT ILLINOIS' DRIVER DISTRACTION LAW

Q: Exactly, what is the new law?

A: Composing, reading, or sending messages while driving is illegal, effective January 1, 2010. This includes text messages, instant messages, and e-mails from your cell phone, Blackberry, iTouch, or any other electronic communication device. The ban also includes logging onto the Internet. A similar new law bans cell phone usage while driving in a school of construction zone.

Q: What if I'm sitting at a red light?

A: It's still illegal. Drivers must pull safely off the road and park to send a text message.

Q: Can I get pulled over for texting or do the police have to see another violation?

A: Under this law, police officers can stop you simply because they think you're texting or surfing the Internet. They do not need any other reason.

Q: What happens if I get caught?

A: You will get a ticket. The fine ranges from \$75 to \$500 , according to the Illinois Secretary of State's office. Because distracted driving is a moving violation, it will also go on your driving record. Three strikes and you could lose your license.

Q: What if I wasn't texting or surfing the Internet when I got pulled over?

A: Simply show the judge your cell phone records and they'll see if you were texting or surfing around the time police pulled you over.

Q: What if I'm typing in an address on my GPS?

A: You can still type information into your global positioning system (GPS) while you drive. Same goes if you have a GPS feature on your cell phone, assuming you're only using it to navigate.

Q: What if it's an emergency?

A: You may text to emergency personnel, but you'd be better off calling them. But don't try excuses like you're having a "personal emergency." In that case, you should just call.

Q: Are there any other exceptions?

A: Only if you're an on-duty police officer or a commercial driver reading from a system permanently installed in your vehicle.

Q: Why ban texting and not using cell phones?

A: That may be the next step. Chicago, for instance, already bars drivers from making phone calls unless they use a hands-free or voice-activated device.

According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, a crash is four times more likely if you're on a cell phone. At some point, experts expect to see a push to create a statewide ban on drivers using cell phones

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