

Beginning August 1<sup>st</sup>, Minnesota will have new laws concerning driving slow in the left lane and cell phone use in your vehicle. Both of these laws were passed to make driving a safer and more pleasant experience. So let's explore what these new laws mean for you and how you can stay in compliance.

First, we'll talk about the slow driver law. The new law states drivers on a roadway with more than one lane in the same direction of travel must move out of the left-most lane to allow another vehicle to pass when practical under existing conditions. In other words, you are not allowed to cruise along in the left hand lane if there is another driver trying to get around you. The law requires you to move over regardless of your thoughts on the propriety of the speed at which the driver attempting to pass you is travelling. So even if you were travelling at the posted speed limit, if there is at least one driver attempting to get around you and you fail to move out of the left lane, you could be cited under this new law. The law does allow slower vehicles to remain in the left lane under the following 5 exceptions:

- (1) when overtaking and passing another vehicle proceeding in the same direction,
- (2) when preparing for a left turn at an intersection or into a private road or driveway,
- (3) when preparing to exit a controlled-access highway on the left side of the road;
- (4) when the left lane is designated and posted for a specific type of traffic; or
- (5) when the slower vehicle in the left lane is an authorized emergency vehicle.

As a general rule, under normal traffic conditions drivers should only be in the left hand lane to pass a vehicle in the right hand lane. Following this rule allows traffic to flow much smoother on these multi-lane roadways. Under heavy traffic conditions, it may not be practical to move out of the left hand lane and the law is truly intended to address those drivers who unnecessarily impede the flow of traffic under normal driving conditions. Be courteous to each other and we'll all be fine.

Next, let's look at the hands free cell phone law. The new law's most basic tenant is that you cannot hold a cell phone in your hand while operating a vehicle. Drivers may not hold a cell phone in one or both hands, may not type information into a cell phone, may not engage in video calling or live streaming, may not access gaming data, and may not scroll through a cell phone while driving. The law does allow for certain usages of a cell phone in voice-activated or hands-free mode for those 18 years old and older. Hands-free mode is defined as a system that allows the person to use verbal or single touch commands to operate the cell phone or electronic device. Adult drivers may use a cell phone in a voice-activated or hands-free mode to make voice calls or send and receive text messages or other electronic messages. Those under age 18 or operating on a provisional license may not make or receive any telephone calls while driving or make or view any text messages. Drivers may view or operate GPS devices, including cell phones with GPS apps, provided that the driver does not type information into the device nor hold the device with one or both hands. Drivers under 18 may also use a GPS device or GPS app in hands-free mode, but they must set their destination before driving. All drivers may listen to audio-based content played from a cell phone or other electronic device as long as doing so does not require the driver to scroll through the device or hold the device in one or both hands. The law does contain exceptions for people who are attempting to obtain emergency assistance, people who have a

reasonable belief that a person's life or safety is in immediate danger, and for drivers of authorized emergency vehicles performing official duties.

How each driver will comply with this new law is a matter of personal choice. The following are some practical suggestions for using cell phones in a vehicle after August 1<sup>st</sup>.

- Some drivers may choose to simply put their cell phones away or on airplane mode while driving to eliminate the distraction entirely. This is the simplest and least expensive option and also the option with the lowest likelihood of driver distraction. Alternatively, drivers may use cell phones once their vehicle is lawfully stopped, is in a location that is not designed or ordinarily used for vehicular travel, and is not obstructing traffic. This means being in a parking lot, shoulder of the road, or other place where vehicles are not normally driving. This does not include being stopped at a traffic light or in a traffic jam.
- Those with blue tooth equipped vehicles can sync their smartphones to their vehicles and use the voice command options available in either the vehicle or cell phone. As long as the driver doesn't hold the phone, this would be a way to use the phone and still comply with the law.
- A cell phone holder capable of mounting inside the driver's reach in the vehicle is a good option. Most cell phones have built-in speaker phone features and voice recognition technology. The cell phone holder would allow a driver to take advantage of these and other features that may be voice activated or activated with a single touch.
- Drivers may use wired or wireless ear pieces connected to their cell phones. If you use an ear piece, remember that drivers may only have one ear piece in as it is illegal to have earphones in both ears while driving. It bears repeating here that drivers may not hold a cell phone in their hands even with the addition of an ear piece.
- A variety of wired and wireless devices are available for sale that will connect your cell phone to your vehicle's radio even if the radio does not support blue tooth connections. An aux cord may be used to connect your cell phone to an aux input on your radio. If your radio is old school and has a cassette player, an aux cord to cassette adapter is available as a solution. If neither of those inputs is available to you, you may wish to consider purchasing a blue tooth FM transmitter. This device will connect to your cell phone via blue tooth and then transmit a low power FM signal that you pick up on your radio.
- Several manufacturers sell a blue tooth speaker system that allows hands free cell phone use. Most of these clip to a sun visor and operate off an internal battery.

To stay on the right side of the law, put your cell phone down and make use of your phone's voice activated assistant to work your cell phone. More information on the hands free law may be found on the Minnesota Office of Traffic Safety website at: <https://dps.mn.gov/divisions/ots/hands-free>

For more crime prevention information and safety information visit the Benton County Sheriff's Office website at: <https://www.co.benton.mn.us/211/Crime-Prevention>. You can also like and follow us on Facebook and Twitter at @BentonMNSheriff for regular updates and crime prevention messages.