

# San Francisco Chronicle

May 31, 2006

EDITORIALS

## Drives us crazy

**H**OW MANY times have you seen it? A car floats slowly into your lane, suddenly jerks back into its own — and as soon as you pass it, the source of the problem is apparent.

The driver is animatedly engaged in conversation, with the right hand on the wheel and the left pressing a cell phone to his or her ear.

You're not the only one who thinks there ought to be a law.

The state Senate just gave its approval to legislation by Sen. Joe Simitian, D-Palo Alto, that would allow drivers to talk on the phone only when they are using a hands-free method, such as headphones or speakerphone. Simitian's SB1613 would make the use of a hand-held cell phone an infraction subject to a \$20 fine for a first offense, starting in July 2008.

Of course, in a state where cell phones and cars are symbols of freedom and self-indulgence, any attempt to regulate the two is going to provoke a fight. Simitian's bill cleared the 40-member Senate with a bare-minimum 21 "yes" votes. It now goes to the Assembly.

Simitian's attempts to push similar legislation in the past have fallen short, but he is being helped by the growing volume of data that support

what most drivers who are paying attention already know — one hand on the wheel and one on the cell phone is a dangerous combination.

Cell-phone calls have been the No. 1 cause of distracted-driver accidents every year since 2001, when the CHP started keeping statistics. Espe-

specially pertinent to this bill is the CHP's more recently compiled breakdown that shows 25 accidents involving a distracted driver holding a phone for every one in "hands free" mode.

Interestingly, the only formal lobbying opposition has come from Sprint Nextel — even as a Sprint PCS information sheet warns drivers: "You should never use a hand-held phone while driving."

Give credit to Verizon for recognizing from the start that this type of sensible regulation of cell-phone use is in everyone's best interest. Other cellular companies have dropped their opposition after they experienced no loss in business from similar laws elsewhere. Meanwhile, a federal study has shown that switching to hands-free mode on a call results in more accurate steering, more consistent speed and — most critically — a two-thirds reduction in reaction time.

This bill is about saving lives. Our only regret with SB1613 is that it wouldn't take effect sooner.

---

CHP statistics show  
the connection  
between cell-phone  
calls and accidents.

---

# Los Angeles Times

September 15, 2006

## State Takes Hand-Off Policy on Cellphones

The governor will sign bill banning drivers' use of hand-held phones. It will take effect in 2008.

By NANCY VOGEL  
Times Staff Writer

SACRAMENTO — California will become the fourth state in the country to ban motorists from holding cellphones while driving under legislation Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger announced he will sign into law today.

The governor's office said Thursday that the signing will take place in Oakland, ending a five-year campaign by Sen. Joe Simitian (D-Palo Alto) to outlaw one of the most common distractions of California drivers.

Under the law, which will take effect in July 2008, Californians risk a minimum \$20 fine for driving while yakking into a phone — unless they are using a headset, speaker phone, ear bud or some other technology that frees both hands while they talk. Drivers in emergency situations would be exempt.

"Public safety is the governor's No. 1 priority," said Schwarzenegger spokeswoman Margita Thompson, "and this bill will make the streets and highways of California safer by ensuring that drivers have both hands available for driving."

The bill passed both legislative bodies in late August — the Assembly 50-28, and the Senate 21-16. In both houses, the measure passed with largely Democratic support and the votes of a few Republicans.

Although 38 state legislatures considered bills to minimize driving distractions such as cell-

phones this year, only New York, New Jersey, Connecticut and the District of Columbia have banned drivers from using hand-held cellphones.

It took Simitian five attempts to get enough support in the Legislature to pass the bill, but Schwarzenegger warmed to the idea quickly.

In a July online interview in which a reporter asked questions solicited from the public, the governor said he had warned his 16-year-old daughter that she would lose her driving privileges if he caught her driving with her cellphone in her hands.

"I sometimes follow her to make sure that she doesn't make that mistake. If she makes that mistake, then I will take the car away from her, and she will drive with the bus, because it's inexcusable."

Though the only official opponent of the bill was the Sprint-Nextel cellular phone company, several lawmakers argued that the act of conversing — not of holding a phone — is the real distraction to drivers.

They also argued that children, the radio, pets, hamburgers and sodas are all as likely to divert drivers' attention as cellphones.

Some Republican lawmakers criticized the bill, SB1613, as "nanny government."

"What's next — helmets while you're riding a horse? Airbags in the bathtub?" said Assemblyman Doug La Malfa (R-Richvale) during the Assembly floor debate last month.

But Simitian argued that the traffic safety risk of cellphone use while driving is "measurable and significant." In a letter sent Monday to the governor, the senator pointed to academic research in the *Accident Analysis and Prevention* journal that concluded that the risk of death is nine times greater for drivers who use a cellphone while driving.

California Highway Patrol data from 2004 show police reports for 775 accidents in which a driver at fault was using a hand-held cellphone.

There were only 28 reports of accidents in which drivers using hands-free phones were to blame. Preliminary data from last year show a similar pattern.

"When you're on your cellphone," wrote Simitian, "you are distracted at three different levels: aurally, visually and mentally. But what the hands-free requirement can and does accomplish is that . . . you will have both hands free to control the vehicle during those split seconds that make the difference between life and death."

Simitian said he delayed implementation of the bill until July 2008 to help win the support of reluctant lawmakers, give the Department of Motor Vehicles time to update its drivers' handbook and give fair warning to motorists.

The CHP is expected to spend roughly \$500,000 a year, starting next year, to educate motorists about the new law.

The idea for the bill came to Simitian before he was elected to

the Assembly in 2000, when someone asked him at a candidates forum about a cellphone ban on drivers.

"Almost everybody I meet has a horror story they want to tell me," he said.

In addition to motorists in emergencies, the legislation does not apply to people using two-way radios in farm vehicles and tow trucks, although that exemption disappears in 2011.

And although the base fine for a violation is \$20, cited drivers will pay more because of administrative charges tacked on by cities and counties. The base fine rises to \$50 for subsequent offenses.

Simitian said he expected the pending ban in a state with 23 million licensed drivers to lead to better and cheaper hands-free cellphone technology.

Most cellphone makers now include such equipment with their phones.

California may also spur similar bans across the country, said Matt Sundeen, a transportation expert with the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Dozens of states recently have pondered bills aimed at minimizing driver distraction, such as banning unsecured pets in cars and prohibiting younger drivers from using cellphones.

"Clearly, Californians are attached to their cars and attached to their phones," said Sundeen, "and if a state that big passes a law it can have some inspiration on other states."

# San Jose Mercury News

March 7, 2012

Editorials

## Cellphone law proves effective

Death and injuries from traffic accidents have plummeted in California, a trend tied to the 2008 law that bans gabbing on handheld cellphones while driving. Memo to all those drivers still yakking away: Wake up. Distracted driving can kill.

The number of deaths caused by driving while chattering on handheld cellphones dropped by half in the two years after the law took effect compared with the two years before, according to a study released by the state Office of Traffic Safety. That dramatic improvement should persuade 41 other states to enact similar laws. The rest already have.

State Sen. Joe Simitian, D-Palo Alto, take a bow. He pushed the bill until his reluctant colleagues agreed to pass it. Credit also goes to the California Highway Patrol and local police throughout the state for aggressively enforcing the ban. They seem to have wholeheartedly embraced it, probably because they have to deal

with the heartbreak of fatal accidents.

The study relied on a census of police-reported traffic crashes, and the numbers aren't as precise as we'd like. It found that deaths caused by hands-free cellphone use – which is not outlawed – also

---

The number of deaths caused by driving while chattering on handheld cellphones dropped by half in the two years after the law took effect ... according to a study released by the state Office of Traffic Safety.

---

dropped by half. State officials said publicity surrounding the handheld ban may have discouraged hands-free use as well. We need more work to pin down what's really happening here, though common sense certainly suggests the ban on handhelds is playing a role.

Automakers should take note. They're about to start installing touch-screen dashboard displays that let drivers surf the Web. Public officials already are talking about requiring the devices to shut off automatically once a car starts moving, but really – does Detroit need the black mark of having an uptick in traffic deaths to spark increased regulation? Let's just make those touch-screens safe from the start.