



NEWS RELEASE

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Drivers urged to go “Hands-Free” now before new law takes effect

Music streaming apps are allowed provided drivers aren't touching their phones to access them while on the road

(ATLANTA) - The Governor's Office of Highway Safety is encouraging all drivers to start complying with the state's Hands-Free Georgia Act before it takes effect on July 1, 2018.

The new law prohibits drivers from having a phone or stand-alone electronic device in their hand or touching any part of their body while operating a motor vehicle on the road. As long as drivers do not have a phone in their hand or supported by any part of their body, they can make and receive phone calls through the speakerphone feature, earpiece, and wireless headset or if their phone is connected to an electronic watch or their vehicle's stereo.

Drivers can also use GPS and navigational devices via hands-free methods.

“It's become a habit we don't think twice about since we have been talking on our phones while driving for more than three decades and it is going to take time for all of us to stop automatically reaching for the phone when it rings,” GOHS Communication Director Robert Hydrick said. “If you want to talk on your phone or use GPS while driving, now is the time to implement those measures so hands-free will become the instinctive thing to do.”

While it is not required to purchase a device or holder for your phone, the Governor's Office of Highway Safety is recommending drivers who want to talk on their phone to place it where they can easily access it so that it doesn't interfere with their ability to operate their vehicle and will still reasonably keep their attention on the road.

Another option for drivers is to check their settings feature on their phone to learn if it has a “Do Not Disturb” feature. When activated, this feature detects when a phone is moving and notifies the sender of a message or a phone call that the person they are trying to reach is driving and will contact them once the driver has reached their destination.

While the new law will allow drivers to use “hands-free” technology to make/receive phone calls and use GPS devices, drivers cannot at any time use their phones to write, read and send text messages, e-mails, social media and internet data. The use of voice-to-text technology is allowed.

The hands-free law also prohibits drivers from watching videos as well as recording videos, though GPS navigational videos and continuously running dash cams are permitted.

Drivers can listen to music through streaming apps on their phone, but they cannot activate their apps or change music through their phone while driving. Music streaming apps programmed and controlled through the vehicle's radio system are allowed.

However, we do caution motorists that music streaming apps that also have video are not allowed since the law specifically prohibits drivers from watching videos.

"We have received a lot of inquiries about the use of music streaming apps and we want everyone to know you can listen to your music through your phone provided you turn on that app before you get on the road," Hydrick said. "Whether it is listening to music, making a phone call or finding the best route on your GPS, we want to everyone to remember keeping your focus on what is happening on the road is your top priority every time you are behind the wheel."

The Governor's Office of Highway Safety, Georgia Department of Public Safety and local law enforcement officers also remind everyone the law does not contain a 90-day grace period for enforcement.

Many officers will be issuing warnings for violations in the first months of the law as part of the education effort, but citations can and will be issued starting July 1 where officers believe they are warranted, especially those violations that involve traffic crashes.

People can find more information on the Hands-Free Georgia Act at www.headsupgeorgia.com and specific questions can be sent via e-mail to our office at info@gohs.ga.gov.

For information on other Governor's Office of Highway Safety programs, visit www.gahighwaysafety.org and follow us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/gahighwaysafety and Twitter and Instagram at #gohsgeorgia.

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