

Alabama Joins 38 Other States in Banning Texting While Driving

Drivers who text while operating a moving vehicle in Alabama will be subject to fines and points on their licenses, thanks to a new law signed by the state's governor, Robert Bentley. Effective Aug. 1, 2012, the law forbids drivers from composing, sending or reading text messages on mobile devices. Offenders will receive two points on their driving records in addition to escalating fines of \$25, \$50 and \$75 for repeat violations.

The law exempts drivers who use mobile devices for global-positioning navigation or to contact emergency services.

"This bill sends a message that drivers need to focus on driving—not on sending a text," Bentley said at the bill-signing ceremony. "There is nothing so urgent that it is worth risking your life, or the lives of others, by sending a text message while you are driving down the road."

The anti-texting law comes after considerable time and several failed attempts by proponent lawmakers to push the ban through the Alabama Legislature.

"After six years of attempting to get this bill through, persistence has finally paid off," said Representative Jim McClendon, the bill's sponsor. "It took four years for this bill to pass the House, two years for it to pass the Senate, and today I'm delighted that Governor Bentley is signing this bill into law. Our highways will be safer with the passage of this law."

Nationally, almost 28 percent of accidents, about 1.6 million annually, result from talking or texting on a mobile device, according to the National Safety Council. Based on estimates by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), distracted driving killed as many as 3,000 people in 2010. That same year, state troopers tallied more than 1,200 texting-while-driving crashes in Alabama, including five fatalities.

Distracted driving can trigger significant liability for employers whose employees cause death, personal injury or property damage as a result of engaging in this activity while on the job. According to the NHTSA, on-the-job crashes cost employers an average of \$24,500 per crash, \$150,000 per injury, and \$3.6 million per fatality. Still, more than half of workers admit to having used mobile devices to check work-related messages while behind the wheel, according to a 2010 CareerBuilder survey. Accordingly, legal experts recommend that employers establish clear written policies banning texting while driving—and educate employees on the dangers associated with distracted driving.