

22 October 2015

USE OF HANDS-FREE MOBILE PHONES WHILE DRIVING

Purpose

1. The paper invites the Board to discuss the use of hands-free mobile phones while driving and to decide whether to pursue a change of the associated corporate policy.

Background

2. The cross border Health and Safety Group agreed to canvas views from across the Forestry Commission as to the continued appropriateness of our current policies relating to use of hands-free mobile phones while driving.
3. As part of the management of work related road safety, employers should provide employees with clear guidance on the use of mobile phones. FC's [OGB22 Driving at Work](#), in line with the law, makes clear that use of hand held mobile phones while driving is not allowed. OGB22 advises staff not to make outgoing calls using hands-free mobile phones while driving. It further advises that if a driver accepts hands-free incoming calls, to advise the caller that they are driving, and to make the call quick or arrange a call back at another time.
4. Many modern road vehicles (corporate fleet, CAPES and hire cars) come with factory fitted mobile phone hands-free capability. On business request, FC will also pay for a blue tooth headset or fitting of an after-market kit to enable hands-free use of mobile phones.
5. A substantial body of research shows that using a hand-held or hands-free mobile phone while driving is a significant distraction, and substantially increases the risk of the driver crashing. Drivers who use a mobile phone, whether hand-held or hands-free, are four times more likely to crash, injuring or killing themselves and other people. The RoSPA publication [Mobile Phones and Driving](#) explores this matter.
6. There are good reasons for providing mobile phones to staff who drive for work, especially for lone workers and staff who will be travelling through areas where access to a public phone is difficult. But, this should not mean that employees have to use the phone while driving. As per paragraph 3, current FC policy discourages legal use of mobile phones while driving.

7. Forest Management Directors, Area Directors and a selection of National FCE staff were asked for their views on three broad options pertaining to use of hands-free mobile phones:
 - a. Reject any restrictions but follow the law
 - b. A total ban on using mobile phones whilst driving
 - c. Somewhere in-between (actively discourage)

Discussion

8. The view of Forest Services Management Board is to change current policy such that no phone calls are permitted to made, while driving in work time.
9. The Forest Enterprise Executive Team (ET) did not agree we should pursue a full change of policy at this time. The issue was considered to be complex and any decision would need to be balanced in accordance with operational requirements whilst encouraging safe behaviour at all times. Further exploration of the issues was requested.
10. The differing views highlighted above are considered likely to be replicated across the wider FCE staff group. A more precautionary policy than at present would be seen by some as positive move while others are likely to view it as simply making their work more difficult.
11. FC Scotland has not yet taken a view on this matter, although informal indications are that they may request further exploration of the issues and ultimate consideration at the cross-border Executive Board.

Consideration of alternatives

12. Alternatives not fully considered to date include:
 - a. Enhancing the current corporate approach and taking steps to more actively discourage use of hands-free mobile phones while driving, principally by ceasing to supply blue-tooth headsets or hands-free kits.
 - b. Commissioning a more in depth assessment of the issue from the Health and Safety Group, ideally in cooperation with FC Scotland.

Resource implications

13. There are no immediate resource implications associated with this paper, but these would need to be explored if the Board were minded to change current policy.

Risk Assessment

14. Current FC policy is legally compliant.

Tax Impact Assessment

15. Not applicable.

Equality Analysis

16. Equality analysis is not required at this stage but would need to be done for any revision of policy.

Communications

17. There are no communications needs at this stage.

Recommendations

18. The Board is invited to discuss the current corporate approach to the use of hands-free mobile phones while driving at work and to agree how it would like the matter to be taken forward.

Mike Seddon
Director of Operations

14 October 2015