

Bruce on Bikers' Rights

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THE GREAT HANDS-FREE HOAX

How "Feel-Good" Cell Phone Bans Cost Lives & Livelihoods



America is in a recession, a recession that many say will get worse before it gets better. And although the powers that be waited far too long before uttering the "R" word, there are some who predict the "D" word may apply before year's end. Call it what you will, but thanks to a myriad of factors for which we *all* are to some degree responsible, our economy is in a mess. And what do our politicians propose as the solution? Why an "economic stimulus package", of course! *Free money for everybody! Whoo-Hoo!*

The deal Dubya and the Demos have on the table right now will give most taxpayers a rebate of a few hundred dollars—about \$150 billion in total—the idea being we'll all run out and spend it, and that our spending will put the economy back on track. That's what they *think* will happen, but this article explains what will *actually* happen:

<http://tinyurl.com/22zpv5>

Uncle Sam doesn't have \$150 billion to give away, so our government will have to borrow the money, and increase the national debt at a time when our country is all but bankrupt. And what are we likely to do with the money we get? A few hundred bucks is not enough to invest, so most of us will probably rush out to Wal-Mart or Target and blow it on consumer goods ... products made mostly in China and other foreign nations ... increasingly our already astronomical trade deficit.

That's not what the wizards in Washington intended, is it? But it would certainly be yet another example of our government's uncanny propensity to perpetuate the **Law of Unintended Consequences** above all others:

<http://tinyurl.com/zugya>

Yet another example of this regrettable phenomenon can be found in the wave of new legislation aimed at saving lives by restricting the use of cell phones while driving to reduce the number of accidents and casualties attributable to distracted motorists. The *intention* of this legislation may be to force—or at least encourage—motorists to *Hang Up and Drive...*

<http://tinyurl.com/2939tz>

...but is that likely to be the *actual* consequence? Perhaps not, and I'll explain why:

On this overview of **State Cell Phone Driving Laws** maintained at GHS.A.gov...

<http://tinyurl.com/39hfe7>

...the **Governors Highway Safety Association** notes that despite the dozens of laws in place and hundreds of bills proposed, “*No state completely bans all types of cell phone use (handheld and hands-free) while driving.*” In other words, most cell bans apply only to hand-held devices, and contain loopholes that allow the conversations—and therefore the distraction—to continue using hands-free technology. As I have stated before, it is the *conversation*, and not the *device*, that creates the distraction. Here is what the Center for Auto Safety's Executive Director Clarence Ditlow said in his January 2007 letter to NHTSA's Nicole Nason:

"Research has consistently shown that operating a motor vehicle while talking on a cell phone--whether hand-held or hands-free--increases the risk of an accident to three to four times the experience of attentive drivers. The general consensus of the scientific community is that there is little, if any, difference in crash rates involving hands-free versus hand-held cell phones. The two-way conversation on a cellular phone, not the task of holding the phone, causes a cognitive distraction. This distraction induces 'inattention blindness,' inhibiting drivers' abilities to detect change in road conditions."

<http://tinyurl.com/2hp4d9>

Despite the incontrovertible evidence that remote conversations on hands-free devices are *just as distracting*—and therefore *just as dangerous*—as those conveyed via hand-held units, legions of unenlightened legislators from coast to coast are seeking to garner media attention and public favor by proposing laws that restrict only the use of hand-held devices while driving. In the Florida statehouse, for example, we currently have no less than eight different bills proposed that would restrict the use of cell phones while driving (H0175/S0266, H0193/S0504, H0357/S1266, S0680 and S1314). Only two of them apply to hands-free as well as hand-held devices (S0680 and S1314), and they are the only two with no companion.

And what will the likely consequence of all these “feel-good” measures be? To be sure, **many lives that might have been saved by focusing on the distraction rather than the device will still be lost.** And beyond that, well let's see... After Chicago implemented a partial cell phone driving ban, the telecom industry reported that “*Sales of hands-free headsets are being spurred by a new law [that] will result in \$50 fines for driving with a cell phone pressed to your ear.*”

<http://tinyurl.com/ytupjb>

The same thing happened in California, where banning only hand-held cell phones while driving generated a “*...boost in the sales of hands-free accessories, such as Blue Tooth ear pieces and speaker-phone car kits.*”

<http://tinyurl.com/2hnf8z>

And in Pennsylvania recently, the mere *rumor* of an impending ban on hand-held devices “...caused some wireless sales to soar.”

<http://tinyurl.com/ynvr4t>

So regardless of legislative *intent*, about the only *actual consequence* we can count on from half-way measures and partial cell phone bans is a boom in the sale of mobile telecommunications products employing hands-free technology like BlueTooth. *And where are those products*

made? Well according to this Global Sources **Bluetooth Headset Manufacturers & Suppliers** directory...

<http://tinyurl.com/25ws3d>

...of the 443 suppliers listed, **434 (98%) are based in China** (Mainland, Hong Kong, Taiwan), 4 in Korea, 1 each in Singapore and the Philippines, and only 3 in the U.S.

Bad news, but there is one potential upside here: If nothing else, all those partial cell phone bans are bound to funnel millions of dollars—and with them thousands of jobs—overseas. That will leave many Americans with less money to spend on cars and gas ... which should reduce the number of vehicles on the road, the number of miles we travel, and thereby the number of traffic accidents. *So, we just might end up saving a life or two after all!*

Speaking strictly for myself and no other individuals or organizations,

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