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Board Recommends Laws Prohibiting Cell Phone Use While Driving

The National Transportation Board recommended all states prohibit inexperienced drivers from using cell phones while driving, the Associated Press reports.

"We think that inexperienced drivers should do nothing more than concentrate on the driving task," says Joseph Osterman, director of the NTSB's Office of Highway Safety.

The board recommended states prohibit holders of learner's permits and intermediate licenses from using interactive wireless communication devices while driving. Maine and New Jersey have similar laws already in place, according to the AP.

The board also urged the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to develop a media campaign stressing the dangers of distracted driving, and that it work with the American Driver and Traffic Safety Education Association to develop driver training curricula that emphasize the risks of distracted driving. The board cited a study showing that drivers engaged in phone conversations were unaware of traffic movements around them.

The board's recommendations were part of a report on its investigation into a highway crash that took the lives of 5 persons, including a driver who was using a wireless phone at the moment she lost control of her vehicle.

In 2002, a Ford Explorer was traveling northbound on Interstate 95/495 near Largo, Md. at an estimated speed of 70 to 75 miles an hour when it veered off the left side of the roadway, crossed over the median, climbed a guardrail, flipped over and landed on top of a southbound 2001 Ford Windstar minivan. All 5 persons in the two vehicles were killed.

The board found that the probable cause of the crash was the Explorer driver's failure to maintain control of her vehicle in the windy conditions due to a combination of inexperience, unfamiliarity with the vehicle (she had just purchased it that evening), speed and distraction caused by use of a handheld wireless telephone.

Associated Press