

Road hazard: Mobile menace

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- A man on the phone while driving
- Image Credit: Xpress /Virendra Saklani

Dubai: Increasing numbers of drivers are putting themselves and others at risk by flouting the ban on using mobile phones while driving, new figures reveal.

The number of motorists caught making, receiving calls or even sending SMS messages while on the road more than doubled in the last two years.

According to Dubai Police, 5,110 motorists were caught and prosecuted in 2009 as against 2,552 in 2008. Guilty motorists were ordered to pay a fine of Dh200 and given four black points on their driving licences.

Cause of accidents

Salah Bu Farousha, Head of Dubai Traffic Public Prosecution, said: “Not paying attention while driving is mainly the reason behind most of the traffic accidents. Using a mobile phone comes under this category as it distracts the driver.”

If a motorist causes an accident or injuries or kills someone while talking on the phone when he or she is driving, the case will become criminal, he added.

But it's a warning that's often ignored by drivers.

Hassan Noor from Lebanon uses his car to commute to work. He said he is guilty of using his phone while driving: "Everybody does it here. I know I shouldn't do it, but it isn't taken that seriously by the police. It's probably more unacceptable in other nations, but here people aren't much bothered.

Ian Hunt from Britain, who has been in Dubai for two years, said he was surprised by the number of people "openly" using their phones while driving.

"In the UK, the law has changed a few years ago banning mobile phone handsets from being used while driving and initially people ignored it. Then they (the authorities) increased the fine and threatened people with points on their licence. It has had an impact, but only because the police enforced the regulations. Authorities here need to crack down on this seriously if they want people to stop using their phones whilst driving."

Shocking experience

Another Briton, Claire Jones, said drivers may follow rules if they are afraid of getting caught and are prosecuted for using hand-sets. "I was shocked when I saw so many people texting messages with one hand while steering the wheel with the other. It's so dangerous," she said, adding, "People do this as they think they can get away with it."

Legally speaking

The UAE traffic law of 2008, Article No 135, bans the use of phones while driving and penalises the drivers with a fine of Dh200 and four black points. In 2008, the Ministry of Interior issued a list of traffic violations, which included using phones while driving.