

New Commercial Truck Phone Regulations*

As of January 3, 2012, commercial truck or bus drivers will face civil penalties of up to \$2,750, per violation, for using handheld cell phones while operating a vehicle. The new rule, announced in November by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, will include a maximum penalty of \$11,000 for companies that permit this behavior.

The real danger of using cell phones is not the risk of being caught. The accident risk is equal to driving while legally intoxicated, according to a study in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

To help mitigate this risk, fleets can use applications that automatically lock down mobile devices when they detect motion. The real challenge, however, may be restricting drivers from using personal phones while operating company vehicles.

The transportation industry has a precedence of taking controversial measures to mitigate risk. In most cases, measures that seem controversial at first soon become standard practice. Technology that makes it possible to enforce restrictions on drivers' personal cell phones, for instance, may at first seem to drivers to be an intrusive measure.

Consider the history of electronic onboard recorders (EOBRs). For years many fleets resisted using EOBRs fearing they would cause a mass exodus of drivers. Today electronic logs are used by the majority of fleets and widely accepted by drivers.

Technology that monitors driver behavior is also widespread. Many fleets use management systems that report risky behaviors such as speeding, sudden lane changes and panic braking, and other events the moment they occur.

Since fleets already use technology to enforce safety and compliance, is using technology to restrict employees' use of cell phones while driving any different?

*Courtesy of Commercial Carrier Journal