

Safe use of Mobile Phones (or similar devices)

Mobile phones now play an established and integrated part of our daily lives. Many of us use these phones (or other hand held communication devices) as part of our work and because of this there is a need to consider the health and safety implications of their use.

The Concerns

The use of a mobile phone at work brings with it a number of potential risks. These are best summarised as:

- 1) Driving distraction
- 2) Work distraction
- 3) Health effects

This information sheet aims to provide some information on each of these matters and provide further information on the actions being taken by North Lanarkshire Council to minimise the risks you are being exposed to at work.

Driving Distraction

The Department for Transport recommends the following guidelines for safe use of mobile phones in cars.

- **Keep your mobile phone switched off when you are driving.** You can use voicemail, a message service or call diversion to pick up your messages at the end of your journey.
- **If you need to use your mobile phone, stop in a safe place.** Do not stop on the hard shoulder of a motorway unless it is an emergency.
- **Avoid using a hands-free device.** These can be just as distracting as using the phone itself.

North Lanarkshire Council discourages the use of mobile phones whilst driving and permits their use for work purposes in only a few circumstances. Detailed guidance is provided and can be found in arrangement section 33 (AS33) and guidance document GD7 – “Mobile Phones”.

Work Distraction

Using a mobile phone whilst at work will cause distraction. Those using a phone tend to become less aware of the activities that are taking place around them. This could be people carrying things, cars driving through a work area or even just the profile of the ground on which they are walking.

The risk assessments that relate to the work that you do may well determine that the use of mobiles phones at work are not appropriate, or that if they are to be used then some restrictions on where and when they can be used may be established.

Health Effects

Although current evidence suggests mobile phones are safe to use, the NHS does provide some common sense recommendations to help lower any potential long-term risks.

The radio waves emitted by a mobile phone (or other electronic communication devices) are what cause some people concern. You can lower exposure to radio waves in the following ways.

- Only make short calls on your mobile phone, and do not use it more than necessary.
- Children should only use mobile phones for essential purposes and keep all calls short.
- Find out the Specific Absorption Rate (SAR) of a mobile phone before you buy it. This is how much radio wave energy is absorbed into the body from the mobile phone. SAR can vary between different types of phones. Mobile phone retailers have a responsibility to make this information available to you before you buy.
- Keep your mobile phone away from your body when it is in standby mode.
- Only use your phone when the reception is strong: this is often indicated by bars of energy on your phone screen. Weak reception causes the phone to use more energy to communicate with the base station.
- Use a mobile phone that has an external antenna. This keeps the radio waves as far away from your head as possible.

Remember that the greatest risk of injury or ill health comes from using a phone whilst driving.

North Lanarkshire Council

If you use a mobile phone at work, then your manager will have considered its use within their risk assessment of your work activity. If a significant risk is identified via the assessment process then this will have been documented and a range of control measures established to minimise any risk identified. You will be required to comply with these measures.

Risk assessment is an enabling tool so if you believe there is a need to use a mobile phone whilst at work then speak to your manager about undertaking an assessment to ensure that it can be used in the safest way possible whilst complying with the law.

Other Resources

IS11 - Occupational Road Risk
IS23 - Ergonomic Driving
IS48 - Occupational Road Risk –
Head Restraints
IS80 – Minimising Vehicle Reversing
GD7 – Mobile Phones

AS32 - Driving at Work
HSF46 - Occupational Road Risk
Assessment
Online Training (via CONNECT)
Practical Training (Transport Services)