

Text while driving? Better not in Bexley

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By [Elizabeth Gibson](#)

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Texters driving through Bexley will have to keep their fingers off the keypad.

The Bexley City Council voted last night to outlaw typing or reading e-mails, text messages or Internet content while behind the wheel.

Those violating the law will be charged with a minor misdemeanor that comes with a maximum \$150 fine. The new law goes into effect in a month.

"It's very simple," Councilman Jed Morison said. "We're trying to prevent accidents, prevent injuries and prevent tragedies."

Recent studies have found that drivers are six to 23 times more likely to crash while texting.

Washington, D.C., and 19 states have banned drivers from texting in the past two years, according to the Governors Highway Safety Association.

And the organization Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety plans to announce a national proposal on Thursday to regulate phone usage by truckers and bus drivers.

There currently is no law in Ohio that specifically keeps drivers from texting, though state law forbids driving while distracted. State lawmakers are discussing more-specific rules.

Bexley, meanwhile, joins Cleveland as one of a handful of Ohio cities that have banned texting while driving.

Cleveland police have cited 13 people with composing or reading texts while driving since that city's law went into effect in July, said Cleveland Lt. Thomas Stacho.

Some police officers, including Bexley's at one point, have said they worry that bans will be hard to enforce.

Stacho disagreed.

"You as well as I can drive down any street and see who's texting," Stacho said. "This isn't rocket science. It's the simple powers of observation."

Jolene Molitoris, director of the Ohio Department of Transportation, sent out an internal office e-mail on Monday that said there needs to be a cultural shift to condemn texting while driving.

As ODOT looks into using social-networking options, such as sending traffic updates through text messages, Molitoris said the department needs to be cautious about whether that would encourage unsafe driving.

The e-mail also announced that ODOT on Friday will host a "safety mini-summit on texting while driving."

Southern Ohio resident Glen Bevins said it's heartening to see the nation and cities taking the issue seriously.

For Bevins, texting while driving equates to a 14-day gap in his memory and a footlong scar across his chest.

This week, Bevins took 10 steps, his first since July. That's when a texting driver hit his Toyota Camry head-on near Portsmouth. Bevins, 75, was flown to Grant Medical Center in Columbus, where he's had three surgeries on his left leg.

"I've got tubes all through me, but it's hard to believe that texting on a phone caused all these problems," Bevins said. "If they could see what has happened to me, people wouldn't even question pulling over to pick up the phone."

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