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Yukon passes cellphone driving ban

By CBC News
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Yukon MLAs unanimously pass legislation to ban the use of hand-held cellphones while driving.

Yukon MLAs have unanimously passed legislation that will ban the use of hand-held cellphones while driving.

Amendments to the Motor Vehicles Act were passed on Tuesday, meaning Yukon drivers will not be allowed to talk or text with their cellphones while behind the wheel of a moving vehicle starting April 1, 2011.

Government officials are now determining what fines and demerit points should apply to drivers caught violating the ban.

Those with full driver's licences will be allowed to use hands-free devices such as Bluetooth wireless headsets, despite criticism from experts who say such devices are no safer to use than hand-held phones.

Highways Minister Archie Lang said no law can be perfect and he expects some people will try to evade the ban no matter what.

"The law cannot legislate everything," Lang said in the legislature Tuesday. "People must be educated regarding the risks they are taking in trying to multi-task while driving.

"The police must also be willing to enforce this law, and they have publicly indicated they support the proposed amendments and will be enforcing them."

The cellphone driving ban provides an exemption for police officers, firefighters and paramedics who need to use hand-held electronic devices while carrying out their duties.

The exemption allowing drivers to use wireless headsets drew criticism from experts including Alan Shieff of the University of Calgary, who told CBC News this month that drivers who use hands-free devices would still be mentally distracted.

But Yukon transportation officials have said it's important the territory's legislation be in line with other jurisdictions in North America, some of which ban only the use of hand-held cellphones.

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