

Driving While On A Mobile Phone Will Be Illegal In Jamaica

Persons who use mobile phones while driving in Jamaica will soon face fines, with the promulgation of new legislation by the end of 2012, which will make the practise illegal.

Making the announcement recently, Jamaica's Minister of Transport, Works and Housing, Hon. Dr. Omar Davies, said when the Act is passed, Jamaica will have a modernised Road Traffic Act and regulations predicated on ensuring that the road safety issues are addressed according to 21st century requirements.

“We intend to launch pre-emptive strikes against those who are intent on creating imbalances in the traffic environment. This new Act and regulations will, among other things, deal with the issue of driving while using mobile phones, including ‘texting’ while driving,” the Minister said while addressing the opening of the three-day International Road Federation (IRF) Caribbean Regional Congress, held at the Hilton Rose Hall Hotel, in Montego Bay.

He pointed out that studies have shown that a motorist has only 90 per cent control of the vehicle when texting and driving. “Fatal crashes have occurred right here in Jamaica, as a result of drivers using their mobile phones while operating their vehicles,” he stated.

Minister Davies noted that speed, improper overtaking, and failing to keep to proper lanes are among the practises that have resulted in accidents and deaths.

“Whilst we appreciate the freedom the use of a motor vehicle provides the citizen, this freedom must be exercised with the greatest discipline. These negative behaviour patterns are further reinforced by the fact that very often, drivers and passengers are not wearing seatbelts. We will have to continue our public awareness programmes to encourage all drivers and passengers in motor cars to wear seatbelts and, more importantly, remind back passengers that under the law they are also required to wear their seatbelts,” he stated.

Meanwhile, Dr. Davies told the gathering that recent crash data indicates that 59 per cent of pedestrians killed were in rural areas. He said part of the issue is that there needs to be more sidewalks. Therefore, the Minister said, he has issued instructions to ensure that adequate provisions are made on the country’s roadways for pedestrians.

Minister Davies said as part of the road improvement programme, much needed guardrails will be procured for installation in critical areas in Manchester and Clarendon.