

Bill Rea ? Will new rules go too far?

I think there's a lot to be said for the plans the Provincial government announced last week for cracking down on careless and distracted drivers.

But there are also legitimate questions as to whether the government is going too far in some respects and not far enough in others. For example, the news releases I have seen make references to getting cameras mounted on school buses so vehicles that illegally pass them, such as when they are picking up and letting off youngsters, can be caught more easily, and in a way that would be admissible in court. What are they waiting for?

I know I've seen my fair share of cars that have just kept going when they should have stopped for a school bus. School buses are usually big and always bright yellow. When they are picking up or dropping off, they have big, red lights flashing at both ends and a stop sign protruding near the driver's window. My point is these things are pretty hard to miss, yet there are a lot of people who accomplish the feat.

I can also go along with provisions to create a new offence of careless driving causing death or bodily harm. To be honest, I was little surprised when I read about that one, mainly because it dawned on me that such provisions were not already on the books. They should have been there a long time ago.

The whole thing ties into being attentive when you're driving, and that's simply part of good common sense, is it not?

The main thing is this all reverts back to the concept of distracted driving, and there are plenty of statistics to indicate that's a very serious menace on our roads. Police services, including Caledon OPP, raise that issue constantly, in the form of press releases, etc. But my concerns come from the definition of distracted driving.

Granted, people who use hand-held devices to text messages while they're driving are something of a problem. They are focusing on their message and not on the care and control they are supposed to be exercising over a couple of thousand pounds of machinery moving at an appreciable speed. The main problem with that is they take their eyes off the road while texting, making it easy for them to miss the little kid who has ventured on the road to retrieve the ball that has rolled there.

Yes, when it comes to texting, I'm hard pressed to think of anyone who would consider that proper activity while driving. Indeed, anyone who would consider it proper probably shouldn't be driving in the first place.

But there are circumstances that I think lie in a grey area.

Case in point: I was driving last Saturday with my wife in the car when my cell phone rang. I usually carry my phone in the breast pocket of my shirt. I reached into the pocket, took out the phone glanced at it briefly to see the number of the person who was calling (it was my brother, with whom I had left a message to call me about an hour before) and handed it to Beth, asking her to answer it. She did all the talking on the phone.

Was I in violation of anything?

I don't think I was. My eyes never left the road except for that brief glance at the number. I spend more time checking the blind spot when I change lanes (a practice that was drilled into me by the guy who taught me to drive about 43 years ago) than I did being distracted on this occasion. Yet I have spoken to a few people about it, and some of them think I was lucky a cop wasn't around to watch what I did.

Incidentally, had Beth not been in the car with me last Saturday, I would have handled things in a significantly different fashion. I would have pulled off the road as soon as an opportunity presented itself, taken the car out of gear, put the parking brake on and turned on the flashers. And then I would have taken the phone from my pocket, looked at the number, then talked to my brother. Yet according to what we're hearing, if the new legislation that we're being told is to be proposed goes through, I could have had my licence suspended and faced a very hefty fine if an officer decided to get picky. That bothers me.

There is a big difference between people who glance at their devices and people who use them to get into an involved texting conversation.

And what exactly constitutes distracted driving?

Am I considered distracted if I put my transponder into position before going onto Highway 407?

If I take a second to change the station on the radio in my car to catch the hourly newscast, am I breaking the law? I shouldn't have to be fooling around with air conditioning in my car in September, but as we all know, this is a unique September. Those of us who are trying to adjust the temperatures might be in violation. Am I committing an act that is contrary to the law because my radio (or the attached CD player) is playing a favourite song of mine, and I am enjoying same?

It's a good thing I quit smoking more than 20 years ago, because the very acts of lighting up and flicking the ash away could be construed as distracting if one is also driving at the same time.

Part of the problem is there is, as yet, no legislation. There's just been an announcement that something is coming. Perhaps there are some changes to the rules of the road that are warranted, but they have to be tempered with common sense. Go after the stupid people who text lengthy messages while driving. I don't want to share the road with them either. Leave the rest of us alone

