

Effective the first of 2012, the Federal Motorist Carrier Safety Administration banned the use of cell phone use by commercial drivers which require using one hand.

Texting has been banned since sept of 2010 . The new regulation has several exceptions , some of which reflect the still unresolved tension in our society between ease of communication and the very real danger of distracted driving.

We all love the convenience of being able to be in voice contact with practically anyone in the world just by using a small hand -held device.

The dangers of that convenience while driving are profound and undeniable. It has been reported that distracted driving is the number one cause of accidents and cellphones are the number one distraction.

Depending on the source, odds of being in a crash are 3 to 4 times more likely when cell phone use is involved. These figures are comparable to dangers of drunk driving.

Use of a hands free phone does not significantly affect those odds.

Perhaps we are watching the evolution of new attitudes towards phone use and driving. It is logical that it would begin in the use of cell phones while driving commercial vehicles. The potential for injury and death when a large truck is involved in a crash has always mandated greater regulation .

That's why some of the exceptions to the FMCSA's new regulation are hard to reconcile with the regulation's stated purpose to eliminate or reduce visual, cognitive and auditory distractions.

Emergency use ,as with texting , is permitted.

But the regulation defines "using" as including pressing more than one button to dial or answer a call. On it's face , this would seem to allow hands free phone use with voice activation.

While at a minimum we'd all like to see truck drivers with both hands on the wheel, the research to date indicates it is the distraction of conversing itself that is the primary danger.

Even more perplexing is that the ban does not apply to CB radios or GPS systems.Perhaps there would have been too much of a push back politically if truckers were banned from the long tradition of CB use but it's hard to figure out why anyone should be allowed to program a GPS while barreling a multi -ton truck down an Interstate.

The new regulation is at least a first step and perhaps a necessary small one in the evolution of attitudes towards distracted driving.

It used to be said ,in the days before Wikipedia, that the law and dictionaries are always 10 years out of date. While information seems to be updated on the fly these days, the law may require more experience and consensus to catch up with new realities.