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RAC: New data "lays bare the scale of the country's handheld mobile phone epidemic"

Reacting to [data released this morning that shows far fewer fixed penalty notices being issued in 2015 to drivers illegally using a phone at the wheel](#), RAC road safety spokesman Pete Williams said:

“The number of fixed penalty notices issued by police forces in England and Wales for illegal handheld phone use at the wheel has, frankly, fallen off a cliff. In 2011, 123,100 notices were given; last year the figure dropped to just 16,900, a staggering 86% fall over five years. Between 2014 and 2015, 43% fewer notices were issued for the offence.

“The figures lay bare the scale of the handheld mobile phone epidemic that has been allowed to sweep across the country largely unchallenged. The simple truth is the problem of illegal handheld phone use at the wheel is undeniably getting worse, with fewer and fewer people being caught.

“RAC research released in September showed that the number of motorists that think it is acceptable to make a quick call doubled from 7% in 2014 to 14% in 2016 , while a fifth (20%) now believe it is safe to check social media on their phone while stopped in traffic. Attitudes are clearly relaxing as a result of drivers no longer fearing punishment.

“As a result of pressure from the RAC, the Government responded by announcing tougher penalties will be introduced from 2017. But we fear this alone will not be enough to bring about a change in the attitude of those motorists who continue to believe it is acceptable to use a handheld phone while driving.

“Law-abiding motorists who regularly see others using a handheld phone at the wheel, putting lives at risk, want to know that the law is being enforced. With a 27% decline in full-time roads policing officers since 2010 and little chance of an increase in numbers in the near future, we need to see all police forces giving greater priority to the enforcement of this offence.

“And better enforcement needs to be backed up by more driver education about the true dangers of handheld mobile phone use, and a heavyweight road safety campaign akin to that which has been successful in making drink-driving socially unacceptable.”

For data by police force, please refer to the table available to download below.



[Watch video on YouTube here](#)

Timeline

December 2003 – Government introduces offence of using a handheld phone at the wheel

February 2007 – Tougher penalties introduced for the offence

March 2016 – Government’s consultation on increasing fixed penalty notice

and penalty points for drivers using a handheld phone while driving closes

15 September 2016 – RAC Report on Motoring research indicates scale of handheld mobile phone epidemic

17 September 2016 – Government responds and announces increase in penalty points and fixed penalty notices

27 October 2016 – new figures from the Home Office show number of fixed penalty notices issued for illegal handheld phone use dropped by 86% between 2011 and 2015

The press office email address is press.office@rac.co.uk and media centre is at media.rac.co.uk. **Please note:** the press office is unable to help with individual customer enquiries - please visit the [RAC contacts page](#) to find the right contact.

About the RAC

The RAC, an iconic UK brand, provides complete peace of mind to nearly 14 million UK private and business drivers, whatever their motoring needs. As well as its premium nationwide breakdown assistance service – with an expert branded patrol workforce attending more than two million breakdowns every year – it offers a wide range of market-leading products across insurance, legal services, vehicle inspections and service, maintenance and repair. Included in this is the first-of-its-kind nationwide Mobile Mechanics service which brings the garage to homes and workplaces.

At the forefront of new solutions for business fleets and consumers, the RAC's breakdown service is electric-ready with mobile EV charging technology and can be called on using [myRAC](#) – the all-in-one route planner, fuel finder and breakdown reporting app.

Visit the [RAC website](#).

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