

Executive Order bans texting while driving

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Executive Order bans texting while driving for Feds

WASHINGTON, Oct. 13, 2009 - In an executive order issued Oct. 1, President Barack Obama banned federal employees from text messaging while behind the wheel on government business.

"With nearly 3 million civilian employees, the federal government can and should demonstrate leadership in reducing the dangers of text messaging while driving," Obama said in the order. "A federal government-wide prohibition on the use of text messaging while driving on official business or while using government-supplied equipment will help save lives, reduce injuries, and set an example for state and local governments, private employers, and individual drivers."

Text messaging, or "texting," encompasses more than simply sending a text message via a handheld communication device. It also includes reading from any handheld or other electronic device, including for the purpose of SMS texting, e-mailing, instant messaging, obtaining navigational information, or "engaging in any other form of electronic data retrieval or electronic data communication," the order said.

The order defines driving as "operating a motor vehicle on an active roadway with the motor running." This includes the time the vehicle is temporarily stationary because of traffic, a traffic light or stop sign or other cause.

"It does not include operating a motor vehicle with or without the motor running when one has pulled over to the side of, or off, an active roadway and has halted in a location where one can safely remain stationary," Obama said in the order.

While the order applies specifically to federal employees, it also asks contractors to follow suit, and encourages civilians to adopt the same measures while operating their own vehicles.

Agencies are being directed to implement this order through the consideration of new rules and programs and re-evaluation of existing programs. Agency heads are urged to conduct education, awareness and other outreach for federal employees about the safety risks associated with texting while driving.

"These initiatives should encourage compliance with the agency's text messaging policy while off duty," Obama said.

Agencies have 90 days to take appropriate measures to implement this order, adopt measures to ensure compliance with the ban on text messaging -- including disciplinary action for violations -- and notify the transportation secretary of the measures undertaken.

Agency heads may exempt certain employees, devices or vehicles that are engaged in or used for protective, law enforcement or national security responsibilities or on the basis of other emergency conditions, the order says.

