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CELL PHONE ORDINANCE TAKES EFFECT WEDNESDAY

Missoula Goes Hands-free

The City of Missoula's new ordinance prohibiting the use of hand-held cell phones while driving a vehicle or motorcycle or riding a bicycle goes into effect Wednesday, Dec. 5.

Police officers will be active in making stops when they observe violations, but they will issue no citations during the 60-day warnings-only period. The exception to the warnings-only provision is if the operator of a vehicle causes an accident while violating the ordinance.

The ordinance allows the use of hands-free devices. It also makes exceptions for people driving emergency vehicles, people summoning emergency help, operators of two-way radios for work-related duties and drivers who have pulled out of the driving lane and stopped.

When the warnings-only period ends, the minimum penalty for a first offense will be \$100 and for the second offense within 12 months \$150. The minimum fine for use of a hand-held cell phone by a driver involved in a crash will be \$350.

The Police Department and Communications Office are working together on a public information campaign and also with the Public Works Department on informational signs, all aimed to be in place before Feb. 5. The ordinance dictates that 50 percent of the money collected in fines will be earmarked for signs and public information about the ordinance.

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