

“PRAISE”: Preventing Road Accidents and Injuries for the Safety of Employees



Interview with John Klee,
Corporate Communi-
cations Manager, 3M

ETSC’s PRAISE project, “Preventing Road Accidents and Injuries for the Safety of Employees” aims at mobilising knowledge needed to create work-related road safety leadership. This Fact Sheet complements the PRAISE Report Minimising In-Vehicle Distraction. 3M introduced the ban of mobile phones including the hands free option, as company policy. We interview the corporate communications manager to understand how this policy was introduced and the effects it has had also how this fits into 3M’s broader road safety commitments.

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Road Safety Management at 3M

1. Can you provide any figures tracking your safety performance over the years?

We have around 800 company car drivers and the most common incidents involve drivers hitting a static object, such as a bollard or a wall. The most common accident involving another vehicle is one of our drivers being hit in the rear by another car – we had 20 or so of those in 2009.



Accidents requiring employees to take time off work are thankfully infrequent, at around four per year, but we obviously want to get that down to zero if we possibly can.

2. How are transport safety decisions taken at 3M?

We have a Fleet Steering Committee, which operates throughout the year but only meets formally every six months. This team deals with all aspects of managing our fleet, from agreeing which cars are made available, through to emissions policies and safety considerations. It has a core membership made up of senior managers representing human resources, finance, functional units and customer-facing businesses and calls on our insurance and safety experts for specific topics.



3. Do you think that companies who have employees on the roads have a duty to go beyond the legislation regarding traffic safety of the country in which they operate?

At 3M we always strive to do business 'in the right way'. I think it is fair to say that we take legislation as a starting point and aim to go beyond mere compliance. For example, in the UK it is perfectly legal to use a hands-free phone while driving – but we have banned it for our employees. It is legal but it is dangerous – and we don't want our employees to be a danger to either themselves or other road users.

4. What would you say are the main drives for your company's efforts in road safety?

As a bare minimum, we have a responsibility to ensure our employees get through the day safely, fit and well. To that end, all our employees know the company would not want them to take unnecessary risks whether they are in their workplace or on the move. We can't sit alongside them while they're driving – but our people do know that we want them to behave responsibly in everything they do.

That general mindset is important – it is clear, simple, easy to understand – and while people might 'forget' a policy, they can't forget that you want them to get home safely to their families at the end of the day.

3M's Mobile Phone Policy

1. What are the main elements of your company's mobile phone policy?

There's really only one element – don't use a mobile phone while you are driving. Even if our employees are in their private car and using their personal mobile phone, they are not allowed to make or receive business calls unless they are parked up safely with the handbrake on.

2. When did you start looking at this problem, and what motivated you to start?

The UK Government introduced new legislation – the Corporate Manslaughter and Corporate Homicide Act in 2007. This allowed for companies and organisations to be found guilty of corporate manslaughter as a result of serious management failures resulting in a gross breach of a duty of care.

In common with most businesses, this prompted us to review all relevant company policies. It was as part of this process that we became aware of research which showed that drivers were four times more likely to have a crash when using a mobile phone when driving. The research showed conclusively that phone conversations are a distraction for drivers – and that goes for hands-free calls, too.

3. Did you contact any organisation/road safety experts to help you prepare your policy?

We have been a long term supporter of Brake, the road safety charity here in the UK and they were hugely supportive of us for the stance we took. TRL, the UK's leading Transport Research Laboratory, which is located just a few miles from our UK Head Office,

also shared findings from their own research, which we have used to reinforce the need for this policy with our employees.

They didn't help us with the preparation of the policy – but they did provide us with important research data which helped us to explain the reasons for the ban in our communications to employees.

4. How do you enforce your policy to ensure drivers do not use their mobile phones?

3M employees are intelligent adults and our culture encourages independent thinking and taking personal responsibility. The vast majority are first class 'corporate citizens' and will adhere to company rules, but our aim from the outset was to educate them on the dangers presented by the distraction of having a phone conversation while driving - and for them not to want to make or receive calls while on the road.



This wouldn't work for every organisation – it depends on individual corporate cultures – but our preferred approach is to focus on education rather than disciplinary proceedings.

5. What is the procedure if you identify a driver who is using his/her mobile phone?

You occasionally hear a colleague talking on the phone in the office and it is evident that the person they are calling is driving. They get off the phone as soon as they can and say: "Call me back when you're not driving and it is safe". There will then often be some office chat about why the driver had even answered the call if he/she was driving at the time. For many employees, making a call while driving has become as socially unacceptable as drinking and driving – it is recognised as being dangerous and not tolerated.

Of course, as with all policies, disciplinary procedures are an option for persistent offenders who willfully break the rules, despite understanding the risks associated with their actions.

6. How many such cases have you had?

No-one has been put through disciplinary procedures on this issue. I have no doubt that there will be some

people who don't agree with the ban or dislike it, as it impacts on the way they have become used to doing business, but that's not the issue.

For people who might want to challenge the ban I have always had the option of asking Brake to send us one of their volunteers – maybe a parent whose child has been killed by a driver who was talking on the phone at the time. We haven't had to do that yet, but it would put the message across more forcefully than disciplinary procedures ever could.

7. What has been the opinion of employees, are they supportive? Did you consult with them?

We didn't consult them about the policy – once we understood the risks there wasn't really anything that anyone could have said to convince us to allow such an unsafe practice to continue. However, I did consult with some members of our sales force about the communication of the policy. I invited them to a meeting, told them what we were about to announce, and asked for their reaction. I felt that would help me to decide how best to position the ban. The first reaction surprised me, though. One of our guys just said: "Good - and about time, too. We all know it's dangerous and it should have been banned long ago." It became apparent that several of them had assumed that they were required to stay in contact all the time. For them, there was a sense of relief that the company was making it clear that it did not want them to act in any way that could cause harm either to themselves or other road users.

For others, though, the reaction was more in line with what I expected: "This is going to make my job much harder." They were not happy and I respect the sincerity of the views they expressed - but we weren't really going to say: "OK, you might kill someone in the process, but carry on regardless."

Also, when we talked to our people about the types of calls they were making when driving, they were generally catch-up calls. You can't conduct a detailed price negotiation while you're driving, for example, and we found that the vast majority of calls were not business critical. The challenge is for people to plan their days and their journeys so they can stop safely at regular intervals to make and receive calls.

That said, we started getting feedback to say many were becoming frustrated to find that, by the time they had stopped to return people's calls, the callers were themselves unavailable and that an unreward-

ing game of ‘telephone tag’ then ensued, with both parties returning calls but being forced to leave messages. Our sales force has now been equipped with Smartphones, so if the person they are calling is not available, they can drop them an email and deal with the enquiry in that way.

We have been monitoring employees’ views since the ban was introduced in 2008. The most recent survey, conducted in June 2010, showed that 42 per cent felt positive about the ban – well ahead of the 19 per cent approval when the ban was first introduced. 37 per cent said they felt negatively about the ban – which is a lot better than the 56 per cent opposition in 2008.

8. What have been the lessons learnt and what would be your main advice to other companies?

We don’t think it’s 3M’s place to tell other organisations how to go about their business, but we are very happy to share our experience. We are a Business Champion for the Driving for Better Business campaign, which is supported by the UK Government, and we have spoken to many companies who want to understand how we implemented our ban.



As I say, though, every organisation is different and the approach to introducing such a ban has to be tailored to individual organisations’ cultures. I know of one company where check calls are made to drivers periodically. If they answer and it is clear they are driving, they are disciplined. That’s the right approach for that company – but it wouldn’t be the way for 3M.

9. How did you come to the conclusion that also the use of hands free systems was an important risk factor?

People know that hand-held calls while driving are dangerous. Most of us have experienced vehicles being driven erratically while the driver struggles to indicate, turn the steering wheel and hold a phone at the same time, so everyone understand why that has been made illegal.

However, there is compelling evidence that having a hands-free phone conversation can also have a significant negative impact on driving performance. It is the conversation that causes the distraction, as the driver

focuses on what is being said rather than focusing on the road and what other vehicles are doing.

1,600 of our customers took part in a survey we ran in 2009 and 30 per cent of them admitted to having missed a turning while conducting a hands-free phone conversation. I think it’s fair to say that would have been because they were distracted. Worryingly, that figure rose to 52 per cent amongst sales people who were on the road 3 days or more every week.

It was a fascinating piece of research. It showed that 44 per cent of respondents felt the roads would be safer if the practice was banned by law – but that only 22 per cent thought it should be – and that figure dropped to 10 per cent amongst sales people. If that seems illogical, the reason became clear later in the survey. 59 per cent felt such a ban would have a negative impact on their work – and this rose to 82 per cent amongst sales people.

I think this is a topic that people understand on an intellectual level – but there is still a strong emotional response, as we have all become so used to being available constantly.

10. Would you like to see further steps from the government in terms of mobile phone use regulation and sanctions while driving?

I understand that the government would only want to introduce legislation that can be implemented effectively. It is fairly straightforward for the police to see that a driver is holding a mobile phone to his or her ear, so the law against hand-held call while driving can be enforced.

However, it must be much more difficult to provide evidence to prosecute hands-free offences. Drivers could be talking to other passengers in the car or even singing along to a song on the radio. I guess someone has to look at the balance between front line policing and the resources that would be required to marry call records precisely with the time of alleged offences in order to secure successful prosecutions.

The Business Case

1. Have you calculated or do you have an idea of the financial benefits that have or will result from your road safety policies in terms of avoidance of collisions?

This was a preventative measure taken in the light of an identified risk. It wasn't a matter of us experiencing crashes due to people making hands free calls while driving – so we don't have 'before' and 'after' statistics. In any case, the business case here is a moral one rather than financial. Knowingly putting our employees and other road users at risk isn't something we would do.

2. Do you feel that your customers are reassured by knowing that you have strong safety standards? How do you communicate that to your customers?

I think that in all lines of business customers do take note of how organisations treat their employees. If a supplier doesn't treat its employees well, it is difficult for its customers to feel confident that they will be treated any differently. 3M has a proud reputation for doing business 'in the right way' and I think there are brand benefits to be had from being seen to take our employees' well-being so seriously.

I think our customers recognise that introducing such a ban could not have been an easy decision and hope that they respect the sincerity of our intent and our commitment – and feel confident that we will treat them with equal care.

3. How do you feel that you perform compared to competitors in terms of road safety?

This is sometimes cited as a source of frustration for some of our drivers, as they fear that we may be putting ourselves at a competitive disadvantage by taking health and safety so seriously. Although they understand the reasoning behind the mobile phone ban, it's not easy for them to think that competitors who take a more relaxed view on safety are able to make and take calls.

We can't let such thinking push safety down our agenda, though. The challenge instead is to make ourselves more accessible in other ways, such as providing land line numbers for customers to call when our people are driving.

4. Will 3M consider applying for the upcoming ISO 39001 standard on road safety management when it becomes available?

I think this is unlikely, as this doesn't represent a core part of our business.

Other areas of 3M's Road Safety Policy

1. What are the other main elements of your internal road safety policy/strategy?

We have a very strong health and safety culture and our sites are recognised every time they pass a million hours without a 'lost time' accident. If, in one of our plants, a practice was identified that increased the risk of an accident by a factor of four, steps would unquestionably be taken to mitigate that risk. With the car being an extension of the workplace, the same thinking applies.

That's the general background – in addition our company car drivers are required to attend a Defensive Driving Course every four years. It is easy to slip into bad habits, so the occasional refresher, which includes both 1:1 classroom activity and on the road assessment, is a great way to keep safety front of mind.

2. Do you have a way of controlling your employees' speed on the roads?

No – they are required to operate within the laws of the land.

3. Do you have a way of ensuring your employees wear their seat belts?

No – this is a legal requirement and they are required to meet all legal requirements.

4. What do you do in the field of drink driving, how do you ensure your employees do not drink and drive?

Our drivers are encouraged to follow a no-alcohol policy and, in any case (and at the risk of sounding repetitive), they have to operate within the law.

5. Are there other forms of driver distractions that you are aware of (other than mobile phone use) and address in your policies?

Yes – we tell our employees not to eat or drink while driving and company car drivers are not allowed to smoke, either.

6. Do you explain to your drivers the importance of being fit to drive (healthy lifestyle, healthy diet, enough sleep, etc.)?

Yes, as this is an area we cover in our 3M Drivers'

Guide – a handbook that is issued to all company car drivers. Our employees are encouraged to plan their days in advance and to punctuate longer journeys with a 15 minute break every two hours. They are also asked to consider the impact issues such as the weather, road conditions, personal fitness, the effects of medication, etc. could have on their driving performance.

7. Are there any other areas that you would like to mention?

A number of companies have talked to us about our ban as they consider introducing one of their own. They all know that it is a difficult decision to make, as there are natural concerns about productivity and the potential impact on business. We tell them that it could have been a difficult decision for us to make, too – but in the end, it wasn't. Simply, if you have a sincere health and safety culture, you cannot be presented with a hazard that increases the risk of an accident by a factor of four and ignore it.

Short bio

John Klee is corporate communications manager for 3M in the UK and Ireland. He is responsible for both employee and external communications at the diversified technology company. With a 'hearts and minds' approach being taken to the 3M's mobile ban, John plays a leading role in ensuring employees understand the dangers of talking on the phone while driving.

About 3M

3M is a \$23 billion diversified technology company which, since 1902, has been creating innovative products that help make the world healthier, safer and more productive. Well known 3M brands include Scotch, Post-it, Scotchgard, Thinsulate and Scotch-Brite.

3M employs some 75,000 people worldwide and has operations in more than 65 countries. It produces tens of thousands of innovative products for customers in dozens of diverse markets and its 40+ technology platforms touch nearly every aspect of modern life.

3M innovation plays a major role in road safety. Its materials are used in license plates, road signs and road markings, enabling drivers to see them sooner and react more quickly, helping to avoid accidents. 3M also provides conspicuity tape to make vehicles more clearly visible, as well as driver feedback signs that display the speed of passing motorists.

The UK and Ireland is home to one of the largest 3M subsidiaries outside the USA, employing more than 3,500 people across 17 locations, including 10 manufacturing sites.

Products manufactured in the UK include coated abrasives, occupational health and environmental safety equipment, adhesive tapes, industrial microbiology products, drug delivery systems, high-performance coatings, secure documents and passport scanners.

www.3M.com

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PRAISE Fact Sheet

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