

Campaign to ban hands-free phones

Ben Dorries

Gold Coast bureau

CALLS to ban motorists from using hands-free mobile phones while driving are increasing in the wake of university research that claims the practice could be as dangerous as drink driving.

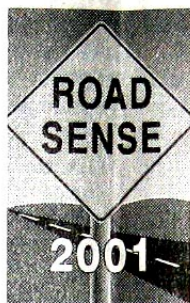
Griffith University's Paul Treffner said governments would face growing pressure to scrutinise legislation that allowed motorists to use hands-free mobile phones, but prohibited hand-held mobiles.

Canadian research shows drivers who conduct conversations using a hands-free mobile increase their chances of having an accident by four times – the same as if they were drunk.

Other overseas studies have concluded using a hands-free while driving poses a similar increased risk of accident to using a hand-held mobile.

Queensland Transport figures show 5602 motorists were issued with infringement notices for using hand-held mobile phones between December 1999 and December last year.

A Griffith University research team, headed by Dr Treffner, is using the Holden Performance Driving Centre at Ormeau,



Road toll to yesterday: 79
Last year: 91

south of Brisbane, to study how mobile phone conversations affect motorists' performance.

Driving Centre general manager Russell White said mobile phones were an unknown killer of drivers and

lawmakers should consider banning their use in cars altogether.

"This issue is taken miles too lightly ... even the ring of a mobile phone in a car can startle and make a driver veer off the road," Mr White said.

The research team will use a car equipped with a global positioning system and sensors to monitor how phone conversations affect driving.

Researchers say it is likely the study, which expects to have results early next year, will have similar findings to the Canadian research.

It will investigate the performance of novice and experienced drivers during different types of mobile phone conversations.