

Leader

Number of P and L-plate drivers caught using phones on the rise

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THE number of Victorian learner and P-plate drivers caught using a mobile phone has more than tripled in four years.

New Victoria Police figures show the number of learner and probationary drivers fined in 2013-14 for using a mobile phone was 1363, up 265 per cent from 373 in 2009-10.

The number of fines more than doubled in 2013-14 when compared to the previous year, increasing 142 per cent from 561 in 2012-13.

The increases come despite a complete ban since November 2013 on learner and probationary drivers using a mobile phone, including a hands-free device.

The fine for drivers talking illegally on a mobile phone has increased to \$443.

Those caught now also face losing four demerit points — up from three.

Victoria Police spokeswoman Sara-Jane Hooper said young people were not only more prone to engaging in risky behaviour but technology was also part of their lives.

“It is challenging for young people to understand that the use of something, which is so intuitive to them, is sometimes unlawful,” she said.

Road Trauma Support Services Victoria chief executive Cameron Sinclair said young drivers were clearly not getting the message.

“It is incredibly concerning,” Mr Sinclair said.

“Whether people are driving for one year or 20 years, driver distraction is a significant risk. But what compounds it is the younger drivers’ lack of experience and lack of acknowledgment of the risk factors on the road.”

Mr Sinclair said technology that could automatically disable mobile phones in cars might prove to be the only foolproof method to stop young drivers from using their mobile phones while driving.

“In the meantime, really all we have got is more enforcement and education programs and we just hope any experience they have on the roads doesn’t kill them.”

However, the message does seem to be getting through to adult drivers, with the number of full licence Victorians fined for using a handheld mobile phone while driving dropping by more than 20 per cent in one year.

In 2013-2014, the number of drivers fined for using a handheld mobile in the state decreased 23.44 per cent to 45,012, when compared to the previous year.