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## BUSINESS

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Posted Aug. 02, 2005

# Office rules put cell phones on hold

### Policies keep some control over the calls

**By Kristin Stankewicz**  
*For The Post-Crescent*

Just as your boss reaches a critical point in her presentation, you hear it: the electronic strains of Axel F coming from your cell phone. Your face grows hot as you fumble to turn it off, hoping no one will realize you're the culprit.

Sound familiar?

With more than 128 million in the United States using cell phones, the lack of etiquette surrounding their use is a growing problem.

In the workplace, inappropriate cell phone use can lead to decreased productivity and safety hazards. To counter that, some area businesses have developed policies to deal with such concerns.

At OEC Graphics I.T. in Appleton, a division of OEC Graphics Inc., the employee handbook devotes a page and a half to cell phone usage.

The policy states, "Employees are expected to use the same discretion as company phones—no excessive calls," said sales representative Katie Running.

In addition, personal cell phones must be in silent mode during the work day.

Julie Bertram, business development specialist for Manpower in Appleton, said although the employment services firm doesn't have a formal policy, "there are definitely understood, informal policies."

"I think the biggest thing is that you don't have some obnoxious ring turned up to the highest volume," she said. "The rudest thing a person can do is take a call on their cell phone during time someone else has set aside to give you their full attention."

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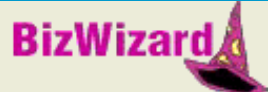
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Fox Communities Credit Union treats in-office cell phone calls the same as other calls. According to Mary Jane Selinsky, vice president of human resources, their policy states "personal calls should be made during lunch or break time.

"When we see someone getting a call and talking on their cell, we will ask if it was an emergency, and if not, ask them to not use their cell during work hours."

Some employer cell phone policies go beyond the office walls, dictating how employees may use their phones while driving.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, about 30 percent of drivers use a cell phone while driving. Employers face a liability risk if an employee has an accident while on the phone.

For example, a 1999 case involving a stockbroker for Smith Barney resulted in a \$500,000 settlement. The broker was allegedly making sales calls on his personal cell phone when he hit and killed a motorcyclist.

In an April survey by the Society for Human Resources Management, 40 percent of U.S. businesses reported having written policies on cell phone use.

At OEC Graphics, the policy states, in part, "Employees are strongly encouraged to pull off to the side of the road ... Employees are expected to keep the call short, use hands-free options if available, refrain from discussion of complicated or emotional discussions and keep their eyes on the road."

The policy is taken seriously, Running said. "When I accepted my position, I was given a cell phone and a hands-free kit and instructed to use it at all times," she said.

Marketing communications firm FH&K in Neenah prohibits use of company cell phones while driving except in case of emergency, according to Mark Ellis, director of business development. For his personal cell phone, Ellis said he has "always had a mounted hands-free unit in my car because it is safer."

Workplace health services provider Theda-Care at Work doesn't have a written policy, but account executive Patsy Romback uses a hands-free device and voice-activated dialing when driving.

Romback said she's seen drivers "who try to make their car an office. Realistically, you can't. You have to use good judgment."

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