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Taija Sparkman • Apr. 18, 2014



Today, mobile technology is everywhere. It's often praised for the increased productivity it delivers outside of the office. But, as more professionals take advantage of the benefits that their smartphones offer them, there has become a need to police that activity in efforts to prevent some of its inherent dangers.

In recent years, as cell phone-related driving incidents increase, companies are starting to feel the impact in the form of affected employees and/or lawsuits if the incident happened during company time or involved a company-issued cell phone.

Some firms also feel they need a policy that addresses the increasing number of state

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phone use. In efforts to address these issues, as well as hold professionals accountable for their own social responsibility, many businesses, including accounting firms, are starting to implement cell phone use policies.

These are the exact reasons Pannell Kerr Forster of Texas, P.C. proactively implemented its cell phone use policy four years ago. The firm recognized both the safety issues and business implications of employees using their cell phones while driving. In addition to requiring employees to “adhere to all federal, state or local laws regarding the use of a cell phone while driving,” the policy also states that employees are not to use phones for business purposes while driving and are completely responsible for any consequences that arise as a result, including the replacement of company-issue cell phones.

“We were concerned that our employees would be distracted drivers while using the phone for business purposes. We do not want them to get into an accident while on the phone or emailing, or texting in particular, if they are answering questions or emails from the office. If someone gets into an accident while working, it may have consequences to the firm,” said Annabella Green, SPHR, AAAPM, Director of Human Capital and Firm Administration, PKF Texas.

Policies like the one PKF Texas has serves to discourage and hold employees accountable for engaging in distracted behavior. The specific provisions of these policies vary by firm and can sometimes include disciplinary actions, such as termination of employment. In addition to implementing written policies, firms are also taking additional steps to ensure staff are aware of the policies, such as:

- Requiring employees sign any policies to indicate they have read and understand them.
- Making employees aware of local laws involving cell phone use.
- Regularly reminding staff to use good judgment when deciding to take or place a

call on their cell phone.

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“This is not really an issue identified within the firm right now. However, during staff meetings, we normally discuss the use of cell phones while driving. We always emphasize the importance of safety while driving especially, if staff are traveling for work,” said Gilda Belmonte Priebe, CPA, CIA, CFE, Partner, E.C. Ortiz & Co., LLP.

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