

# How to Create a Workplace Cell Phones Use Policy



Use of personal cell phones during work can compromise productivity, safety, confidentiality and privacy.

With labour in short supply, you can't afford to have your employees messing with their cell phones when they should be working. Consider these numbers from a recent study by U.S. HR consultant Zippia:

- **66:** The percentage of employees who admit to using their personal cell phone at work several times per day;
- **56:** The average number of minutes employees spend performing non-work-related activities on their cell phone **each workday**;
- **28:** The percentage of employees who say they engage in social networking while at work.

In addition to undermining productivity, distractions resulting from employee use of personal cell phones can create significant health and safety hazards, particularly with employees who drive, operate heavy machinery or perform other safety-sensitive jobs requiring total focus.

One way to eliminate the problem is to ban employees from bringing cell phones to work. But in this day and age, a no-cell-phones-at-work policy is pretty unrealistic, not to mention detrimental to morale and almost impossible to enforce. A more effective approach is to implement a policy establishing clear ground rules on how employees can and can't use their cell phones while at work. Here are the 11 things to include in such a [policy](#).

This analysis covers use of personal cell phones, as opposed to cell phones that companies issue to employees for business use, which raise separate issues.

## **1. Statement of Policy**

Given how jealous employees are of their cell phone rights, you might want to explain why you're imposing restrictions, namely the fact that cell phones can have harmful effects on productivity, safety and privacy (HRI Template Policy, Secs. 1 and 2).

## **2. Definition of “Cell Phone”**

Define “cell phones” subject to your policy broadly as any cell phone” means any handheld electronic for receiving and transmitting voice, text, or data messages without a cable connection, including not only cell phones but also radio phones, pagers, wireless PDAs and Research in Motion (RIM) wireless devices (Template, Sec. 3).

## **3. Clarification of Whom Policy Covers**

State that the policy covers all of your employees, including full-timers, part-timers, temporary employees, independent contractors, dependent contractors, consultants, interns and volunteers and even contractors’ workers to the extent that their cell phone use can create hazardous distractions at your own worksite (Template, Sec. 4).

## **4. Permitted Cell Phone Uses**

Explain that you expect employees to focus on their job while they’re at work and not use personal cell phones for non-work purposes. Personal use of cell phones is okay during lunch, coffee and other breaks, as long as it doesn’t disrupt operations or distract other workers. Tell employees not to bring cell phones to business meetings, unless they put the device in vibrate mode (Template, Sec. 5).

## **5. Non-Permitted Cell Phone Uses**

Next, be clear about what cell phones use are unacceptable during work, including making or taking personal calls, emails or texts (except in an emergency), playing games, shopping for personal purposes, web surfing or engaging in other non-work-related and distracting activities (Template, Sec. 6.1).

## **6. Ban on Cell Phone Use While Driving**

Ban employees from using their cell phones, whether hands on or hands off, to call, text, email or engage in other communications when they’re driving, including hands-off devices using a cell phone or similar device while driving, regardless of whether the communication is personal or job-related. Similarly, ban employees from calling or texting colleagues when they’re aware or should be aware that the employee on the receiving end is driving (Template, Sec. 6.2).

## **7. Ban on Other Potentially Dangerously Distracting Uses**

In addition to driving, ban use of cell phones while performing safety-sensitive tasks requiring full concentration, such as operating machinery, handling hazardous products or serving as a traffic controller or confined space attendant. Again, tell employees to ensure they’re aware of when co-workers are performing these jobs and refrain from calling or texting them until they finish (Template, Sec. 6.3).

## **8. Ban on Unauthorized Photos, Videos or Audio Recordings**

To protect privacy and confidentiality, ban employees from using their cell phone to take photographs, videos or audio recordings of co-workers, customers, clients, visitors or other individuals they encounter at work without the person’s consent.

The ban should also extend to using cell phone cameras or other devices to photograph, film or record business operations, meetings, company or customer documents or data or any other business activity, information or interaction without company authorization (Template, Sec. 6.4).

## **9. Ban on Unauthorized Access to Company Networks**

Make it clear that employees can't use their cell phones or other devices to connect to or access your company's IT and data networks without company authorization (Template, Sec. 6.5). You should also establish a [separate policy](#) governing employees' use of personal cell phones to link to company networks.

## **10. Provide for Discipline**

Establish accountability by stating that violations of the policy are grounds for discipline, up to and including termination in accordance with your company's disciplinary policies and procedures (Template, Sec. 7).

## **11. Employee Acknowledgement**

Last but not least, get each employee to sign the policy acknowledging that they've read and understood it and agree to comply with its terms.