

# Mobile Phone Use in Vehicles - Cradles

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In all Australian States and Territories, fully licensed car drivers are only permitted to use a phone to make or receive a phone call, use its audio/music functions, or perform a navigational (GPS) or intelligent highway vehicle system function if the phone:

- Is secured in a commercially designed holder fixed to the vehicle, or;
- Can be operated by the driver without touching any part of the phone, and the phone is not resting on any part of the driver's body.

## Besides being a legal requirement, why use a cradle?

Car cradles can be very inexpensive and, when attached to the dashboard or windscreen, can reduce risks associated with reaching for handsets and help minimise eye time off the road by getting the phone up to the eye line level with the road and within easy reach. Research has shown reaching for objects in cars increases crash risk by 4.8-8.8 times for drivers.

## What are the general guidelines for a cradle?

The cradle must reliably hold the phone in all foreseeable driving conditions and must not interfere with any aspect of vehicle operation. This includes consideration of vehicle safety features such as airbags, visibility of vehicle instrumentation inside the vehicle and visibility outside the car. There are a variety of commercially available units, and while most are perfectly suitable and economical, several are unsuitable and can pose significant safety threats.

*Just because it's legal to use a mobile phone whilst in a correctly-placed cradle, doesn't mean it's safe. Substantial research shows that using a mobile phone (whether hand-held, hands-free, or crate held) impairs driving ability by decreasing performance factors such as reaction time, lane-keeping, and abrupt or aggressive braking (see the [NRSPP's Mobile Phone Use in Vehicles Guide](#) for more information). **Using a mobile phone while driving doesn't add up - next time your phone rings or buzzes, ask yourself "should I really answer?"***

**Even with a cradle, it is still your responsibility to adhere to mobile phone driving laws and play your part in keeping the roads safe.**

### Remember:

- Cradle positioning should prioritise visibility and safe driving ability, not convenience for viewing or using the device!
- Just because your mobile is in a cradle doesn't mean you should still use it in the vehicle. Before making or receiving a call, ensure you as the driver are not increasing your risk for a crash. Ensure you understand the risk, the caller knows you're on the phone, and your eyes and focus remain on the road. If not, call back when you stop.
- Be aware of the specific safety and road rules of your state. For example, **in NSW**, video calls, texting, emailing, task management, photography, social media, shopping and share economy apps are still prohibited whilst driving, even when using a commercially designed holder.



## What kind of cradles are recommended?

### Windshield Mount

A windshield-mounted unit can provide a “fixed” mount and are one of the most common types of phone cradles. However, it should be noted that devices secured to the windshield can obscure the driver’s field of view. Obstructions to the driver’s vision can be minimised by considering (Transport for NSW, 2017) ;



#### 1. The size of the device screen

- Large mobile phones or GPS devices can significantly obstruct driver’s vision in most vehicles, particularly smaller vehicles. Drivers of compact cars should only use devices with screens smaller than 5.5 inches, and drivers of larger vehicles should use screens smaller than 6 inches.

#### 2. Position of screen cradle

- Mounting the screen as far down on the windshield will limit obstruction to the driver’s field of view. If practicable, the screen should be mounted towards the centre of the windshield, to the driver’s left (location 1 in Figure 1). Otherwise, another possible location is the right, bottom corner of the windshield (location 2 in Figure 1).
- Care should be taken to ensure the device is not positioned where it could interfere with airbags in a crash.

No more than two devices should be mounted on the windshield, and a gap of at least 150 mm should be kept between the two devices.

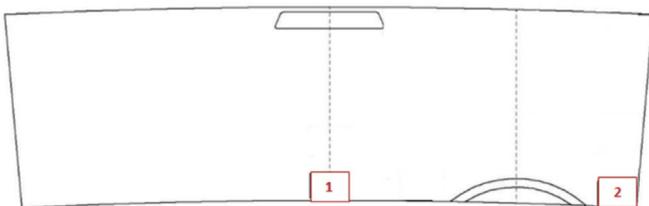


Figure 1. Windshield Mount Positioning

Transport for NSW. (2017, February). Windscreen mounted phones and GPS. NSW Government. <https://roadsafety.transport.nsw.gov.au/downloads/windscreen-mounted-phones-gps.pdf>

### Cup Mount

Especially for vehicles with cup holders towards the front of the centre console, this can be an excellent way to securely and safely mount a phone. It is not recommended for vehicles where such installation places the phone well off beside the driver (requiring the driver to divert their eyesight & focus significantly from the road ahead);



## What kind of cradles are NOT recommended?

### Socket Mount

Socket mount units can vary considerably in how well they “fix” the phone but ultimately they do not do so reliably. To minimise the chances of ending up in a debate with a police officer as to whether or not your phone is “fixed” to the vehicles, these types of cradles are not recommended.



### Vent Mount

These mounts are not recommended. Whether vent mounted cradles are “fixed” is debatable, and losing such a debate with the police could cost you. In addition, vents are almost certainly not designed with this use in mind and any damage to a company vehicle incurred in the use of such a cradle could be placed on the worker’s responsibility to fix.



### Steering Wheel Mount

Pouches that mount the phone on the steering wheel can seem reasonable, but they will almost certainly increase the severity of trauma in a crash: airbag performance may be impacted, leading to the phone being embedded in your chest or face.



What would happen to a mobile phone in this situation?

### Friction Mount

Weighted pads, bean-bags, high-friction dash mats, etc., are not a “fixed” mounting option. They represent a potential distraction when they shift during entirely foreseeable driving manoeuvres and an increased trauma risk when they become airborne in the case of a serious crash.

