

CELL PHONES

and COLLEGE STUDENTS:

Playing It Safe

Cell phones are everywhere, and the facts are dizzying.

In 2009, CTIA – The Wireless Association estimated that there were more than 270 million wireless subscribers in the United States—in other words, that 87 percent of Americans had wireless devices that could be used for voice calls and/or texting. Seventeen and a half million households use wireless service exclusively. And the next figure is staggering—there were 2.23 trillion minutes of use that year and 75 billion monthly text messages over cell phones. Cell phone callers also make more than 300,000 emergency 9-1-1 calls per day.

Ninety percent of Americans between 18 and 29 reported owning a cell phone as of December 2007, “with 32 percent of these young adults indicating they ‘couldn’t live without’ their mobile device,” according to a Pew Internet and American Life Survey. One can safely assume that the number of college students carrying cell phones is higher, because of their young age, and the fact that cell phone usage has increased since the reporting period.

Recent studies have helped fill in the picture of cell phone use on campus. A February/March 2005 survey by researchers at Virginia Polytechnic and State University found that four out of five parents pay their children’s wireless bill because they want their children to have the safety afforded by having a cell phone. Overall, students called their immediate family members, boyfriends or girlfriends, and friends and relatives in fairly even numbers.

A December 2007 study by three researchers looking at wireless usage among students at Ohio State University, shows that college students are changing their behavior because they carry and use cell phones. While carrying cell phones presents definite benefits, practice common sense wherever you are.



THE RESEARCHERS FOUND THAT

- Students feel safer when they carry a cell phone.
- Students, especially females, go places they ordinarily wouldn’t go when they have a cell phone with them.
- Females engage in more risk-taking behavior when they carry a cell phone.
- Students with cell phones are more likely than those without cell phones to alert law enforcement to trouble.

THE RESEARCHERS CROSS-CHECKED THEIR FINDINGS WITH SAMPLES OF STUDENTS AT OTHER UNIVERSITIES AND THE RESULTS WERE THE SAME. SO PROVIDE STUDENTS WITH THESE SAFETY TIPS:

- Don’t give in to a false sense of security just because you have a cell phone.
- Take a friend with you when you go out, especially at night.
- Always tell someone where you’re going and when you expect to come back.
- Stick to well-lighted locations.
- Don’t go anywhere with someone you’ve just met.

