

WORLD CANADA

This Canadian Province Could Ban Pedestrians From Texting While Walking

Katy Steinmetz @katysteinmetz | July 15, 2016

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On Thursday, a member of the Toronto city council turned her attention to a modern scourge: distracted walkers.

Councilwoman Frances Nunziata put forward a motion to amend the province of Ontario's Highway Safety Act so that officials might fine, say, the person who is so absorbed by a video on their phone that they come to a halt in the middle of a crosswalk at a busy intersection. "In my opinion," she said, "that's a safety issue," according to Canada's *National Post*.

Toronto is far from the first to fight the face-in-screen addiction that has accompanied the rise of smartphone ownership. Lawmakers in at least five U.S. states have attempted to pass such legislation. A New Jersey proposal from earlier this year could have not only fined but jailed members of the walking public who texted while crossing an intersection. Generally bills have been killed after discussion about exactly how they would be enforced (do residential streets count or just busy boulevards?) and concerns about the government playing nanny to its citizens.

Nunziata's proposal asks the official overseeing highway safety to "consider" creating a regulation that would prohibit "pedestrians from actively using a handheld wireless communication device or handheld electronic entertainment device while on any traveled portion of a roadway."



Josep Lago—AFP/Getty Images

Gamers use the Pokemon Go application on their mobile phones while walking in a Barcelona park, on July 14, 2016.

Beyond legislation, child-safety groups have tried public-service campaigns. In Delaware, highway-safety officials plopped “Look up” stickers on the ground. And comedy groups have also used outright, mime-like mockery in the form of “seeing-eye people” to highlight the problem.

Anecdotal disgust at how oblivious people have become to the physical world around them, because of their cell phones, is easy to come by. But there is also a growing body of research that suggests it is a legitimate public-safety issue.

A Pew Research Center report found that more than half of pedestrians said they had been bumped into or bumped into something because they were distracted by their cell phone while walking. University of Washington researchers observed pedestrians at high-risk intersections and found that texters were less likely to look both ways or obey lights. Other studies have found increases in injuries related to walking and using a cell phone at the same time, based on emergency-room data.