

Bill Targets Driving With Dogs in Lap

The California bill's author says dogs are potentially dangerous distractions in the driver's seat.

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Drivers carrying a dog on their lap or in their arms on California roads might fetch a fine if a bill that cleared its first legislative review early this week becomes law. The message from the bill's author to motorists: A dog's unpredictability makes him a dangerous driving buddy.

Assemblyman Bill Maze, R-Visalia, authored Assembly Bill 2233, which aims to prohibit drivers from carrying a live animal on their lap while behind the wheel. A citation would be issued by the California Highway Patrol for a standard traffic violation, said Laurie Paredes, Maze's legislative director.

Violators would face the default penalty for a vehicle code violation, she said. The base fine for vehicle infractions is \$35.

"We're not anticipating that there will be a problem," she said of getting the bill to clear the necessary hurdles, including the Assembly Appropriations Committee next week. "We don't have any formal opposition."

Such legislation is needed, Paredes said, because current laws do not specifically address the problem. "Our DMV states that distractions account for one of four traffic accidents," she said.

The alternative to sharing the driver's seat with a dog is at the discretion of motorists, she said, adding, "We are not mandating any tethering or caging of animals."

Tom Marshall, CHP spokesman, said statistics are not available on drivers who sit their pets on their laps. If the bill is enacted into the law, however, he said officers would start to keep track of the violations.

"If we see you we can pull you over," he said, adding that the driver would be subject to a citation. "We rarely, if ever, put our police dogs on our laps when we're on patrol."

While the bill is intended to help keep motorists and others on the road safe, it is always best to keep dogs and other animals safely restrained while in a car to prevent injury.