



Kansas RTAP Fact Sheet

A Service of The University of Kansas Transportation Center for Rural Transit Providers

Getting Enough Rest?

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Fatigued drivers usually cannot remember the last few miles driven. They tend to experience wandering and disconnected thoughts, and have difficulty keeping focused on the road. Fatigued drivers often have trouble keeping their heads up and yawn frequently. They tend to miss traffic signs, drift from their lanes, and jerk their vehicles back after drifting.

Fatigue is a major enemy of transit drivers and their passengers. Particularly fatigue-prone times of day are early morning, after lunch, or late afternoon at the end of a long shift. While there is no quick and single solution to the fatigue problem, sleep is the best countermeasure to fatigue.

Facts about drowsy driving

These facts will certainly wake you up. In a recent National Sleep Foundation Drowsy Driving Fact Sheet, these important fatigue driving statistics were listed:

- The U.S. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) estimates that approximately 100,000 police-reported crashes annually (1.5 percent of all crashes) involve drowsiness or fatigue as a principal cause. At least 71,000 people are injured in sleep-related crashes each year. NHTSA estimates these crashes represent \$12.5 billion in monetary losses each year.
- Drowsiness/fatigue may play a role in crashes attributed to other causes. About one million crashes annually— one-sixth of all crashes— are thought to be produced by driver attention lapses. Sleep deprivation and fatigue make such lapses more likely to occur.
- In a 1999 National Sleep Foundation poll, 62 percent of adults surveyed reported driving a car or other vehicle while feeling drowsy in the prior year. Twenty-seven percent reported that they had, at some time, dozed off while driving. Twenty-three percent of adults stated that they know someone who experienced a fall-asleep crash within the past year.
- In a 1996 survey of 4,600 male drivers in Britain, the drivers attributed seven percent of their crashes in the previous three years to sleepiness and/or fatigue.
- At the 1995 National Truck Safety Summit, driver fatigue was designated the number one factor affecting truck safety.

- People tend to fall asleep more on high-speed highways during long stretches going through rural areas. New York police estimate that 30 percent of all fatal crashes along the New York Thruway occurred because the driver fell asleep at the wheel.

Which drivers are most at risk?

Drivers most at risk when on the job are those who are: sleep-deprived or fatigued, drive long distances without rest breaks, drive through the night or early afternoon or at other times when they are normally asleep, take medication that increases sleepiness or drink alcohol, drive alone, drive on long and rural monotonous roads, and frequently travel for business.

Sleep-related crashes commonly happen with young people who tend to stay up late, sleep too little, and drive at night. In a North Carolina study, 55 percent of fall-asleep crashes on state roads involved people 25 years old or younger. Seventy-eight percent were male; the median age was 20.

Also, 25 million Americans are rotating shift workers. Studies suggest

that 20 to 30 percent of those with non-traditional work schedules have had a fatigue-related driving mishap within the last year. The drive home following the night shift is particularly dangerous.

People with untreated sleep disorders are likely to increase the risk of crashes. Disorders such as chronic insomnia, sleep apnea and narcolepsy, all of which lead to excessive daytime sleepiness, afflict an estimated 30 million Americans. Most people with sleep disorders remain undiagnosed and untreated. Sleep apnea, associated with a three to seven fold increase in crash risk, occurs in four percent of middle-aged men and two percent of middle-aged women.

Steps for improving the work environment

Steps for improving the work environment to prevent fatigue include:

- provide for regular short breaks for drivers throughout the day so they can get out of the bus and stretch and rest their eyes,
- adjust the thermostat for cooler temperatures to keep drivers alert,
- provide napping and exercise facilities for drivers to use driving breaks, and
- keep the vending machine stocked with healthy food to promote fitness and to avoid surges and drops in energy caused by sugary snacks.

Effective fatigue-fighters

Drivers can also do their part to fight fatigue. Here are some tips to keep in mind:

- Get a good night's sleep, preferably about eight hours a night.
 - Schedule regular stops, every 100 miles or 2 hours.
 - Avoid alcohol and medications that may alter driving performance.
 - Consult physicians or a local sleep disorder center for diagnoses and treatment if suffering from daytime sleepiness or insomnia.
- Remember, even if a transit driver is not driving fatigued, it is likely that he or she will encounter a driver who is.

Rumble strips, deep grooves placed on the shoulders of highways, effectively alert drivers that they have swerved off the road. The loud noise gets the driver's attention-fast. If a driver crosses a rumble strip more than once, it is essential that he or she stop for rest, maybe even a nap. Remember, it is not only the driver that is in danger here, but also the passengers.

Proper training in defensive driving along with taking measures to stay alert will mean a safe ride for all.

Source

"Drive Alert/Drive Alive: Drowsy Driving Fact Sheet," National Sleep Foundation.

Reprinted from the April 2002 issue of the *Kansas TransReporter*, a publication of the Kansas Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP) at the Kansas University Transportation Center.