

# Help your drivers stay alert behind the wheel.



In the U.S., drowsy driving is a factor in an estimated 21% of all fatal vehicle crashes.<sup>1</sup>

Drowsy driving is operating a motor vehicle while sleepy, fatigued or exhausted. While most people are aware of the hazards of drinking and driving, many don't realize that drowsy driving creates many similar dangers. Like alcohol, sleepiness slows reaction time, decreases awareness and impairs judgment. Also, falling asleep at the wheel can result in losing control of the car, veering into opposing traffic, or hitting guardrails, medians and other roadside objects.

## Danger signs demonstrated by drowsy drivers.

Drowsy drivers are especially dangerous because, by the time they realize they've fallen asleep, it may be too late for them and others in their path. A condition often experienced by drowsy drivers is called "micro-napping," which is characterized by head bobbing, excessive daydreaming, disconnected thoughts, lane drifting, missing exit signs, yawning frequently, eye irritation and rubbing the eyes.

## Factors that contribute to drowsy driving.

When a driver begins to show evidence of micro-napping, the root cause can often be traced to one or more of the following factors:

- Driving at night after being awake since early morning
- Driving for prolonged periods without taking a break
- Working a constantly changing schedule that interferes with getting a good night's sleep
- Having undiagnosed or untreated sleep disorders such as obstructive sleep apnea
- Using medications that may cause drowsiness
- Consuming alcohol prior to driving
- Experiencing poor quality sleep or a general lack of sleep

Some factors that make matters even worse for drowsy drivers are:

- Exposure to extreme temperatures, vibration and loud or pervasive background noise
- Poor physical condition
- Prolonged periods of emotional upset



<sup>1</sup> *Prevalence of Motor Vehicle Crashes Involving Drowsy Drivers, United States, 2009-2014*, Brian C. Tefft, AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety (11/14), p. 3.

## Some tips to help your drivers stay safe.

As a fleet manager who understands the causes of drowsy driving, you can take measures to prevent it. Before drivers begin their trips, prepare them with effective tips and advise them to be cautious. By encouraging the following behaviors, you can help ensure that your drivers will be wide awake and prepared for any distance they're required to travel:

- **Exercise en route.** Pulling into a safe parking area to do some brisk walking and careful stretching can invigorate a driver's body.
- **Drive in pairs.** If passengers are permitted, a companion's conversation can help keep the primary driver focused and the companion can monitor the primary driver's behavior.
- **Maintain good posture.** Doing so can help a driver stay alert.
- **Take medications responsibly.** Drivers should consult their doctors about the use of prescription or over-the-counter meds and be cautious in taking any that may cause drowsiness.
- **Take regular breaks.** Drivers should take breaks at least every two hours when traveling long distances.

Also, remind your drivers of the building blocks of a healthy lifestyle:

- Proper nutrition
- A calm and quiet sleep environment
- A consistent amount of sleep each night
- Enrollment in a fitness program
- Establishing and maintaining a targeted weight
- Avoiding regular or heavy consumption of caffeinated beverages, nicotine and alcohol (each can interfere with restorative sleep)

Managing your fleet means securing your business's property, but it's also about protecting your employees. By investing the time to explain your company's rules of the road to your drivers, you'll impress upon them just how important their safety is to you. Falling asleep at the wheel can be avoided when drivers are informed and aware.

<sup>2</sup> Survey of U.S. and Canadian Police Officers about the Public's Drowsy Driving Behavior, AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety (2004).



Nearly 90% of police officers report stopping a driver who they believed was drunk, but turned out to be drowsy.<sup>2</sup>

Providing solutions to help our members manage risk.<sup>SM</sup>

For your risk management and safety needs, contact Nationwide Loss Control Services: 1-866-808-2101 or [LCS@nationwide.com](mailto:LCS@nationwide.com).