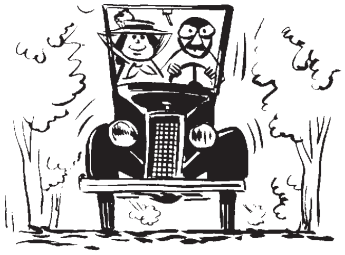
Drowsy Driver's In Alaska

Dealing With Driver Fatigue and Sleep Deprivation

A publication prepared by the Alaska State Troopers Public Information Office.

Driving While Drowsy (DWD) is possibly one of the most under-reported causes of highway crashes and fatalities. Some sources estimates up to 50 percent of all crashes are fatigue-related. Learn to recognize the symptoms in yourself and others, and know what steps to take to avoid becoming a DWD statistic. A fatigued driver is an impaired driver, and that's just as dangerous as a drunk driver. Drive alert--arrive alive.



WHAT IS DRIVER FATIGUE?

This is when a person behind the wheel is too tired, worn out, or drowsy to drive safely.

WHAT ARE SOME CAUSES?

√ *Driving long distances.* **The longer you drive, the more tired you will become.**

√ *Time of day*. **Studies indicate the "driving danger zone" is between 2 a.m. and 6 a.m. when you would normally be asleep. An energy lag can also occur in mid-afternoon made even more critical by warm temperatures and sunshine.**

√ *Tough road conditions.* **Driving in snow, rain, fog or similar conditions can be more tiring than good road conditions.**

√ *Poor sleep habits.* **Sleep disorders or simply not enough sleep can affect the driver.**

√ *Alcohol and other drugs.* **In combination with insufficient sleep, these substances are even more deadly.**

√ *Driving experience and age.* **Young people tend to have less experience with long distance driving and therefore seem to be more susceptible to driver fatigue.**

√ *Poor fitness/nutrition*. **People in poor condition tend to have less stamina and resistance to driver fatigue.**

WHO IS AT RISK?

√ *Recreationalists:* People who complete a full week of work then strive for a full weekend of recreation. Physical demands of fishing, hunting, hiking, boating, motorhoming, and many other outdoor activities contribute significantly to a high risk of fatigue.

√ *Commercial Fishermen:* People who are required to work long, strenuous shifts during season openings.

√ *Shift workers:* People who work nights or rotating shifts disturb the body's natural sleep rhythm making them more vulnerable to fatigue.

√ *Students:* Young people tend to put more demands on their time and often forego sleep in order to participate in other activities.

√ *Commercial Drivers:* Long distance drivers tend to travel monotonous stretches of highway resulting in boredom.

√ *People With Sleep Disorders*: The chronically fatigued can fall asleep for up to 30 seconds without realizing it.

WHAT ARE SOME SIGNS?

√ *Impaired judgement* such as speeding up when slowing down would be safer.

√ *Drifting between lanes*

√ *Missing road signs*

√ *Tailgating*

√ *Boredom*

√ *Reduced reaction time*

√ *Reduced stamina*

√ *Distorted perception*

√ *Can't keep eyes open*

√ *Head feels heavy*

√ *Continued yawning*

√ *Frequently hitting the "rumble strip"* on the shoulder or nearly driving off the road.

√ *Vulnerable to the "moth effect"* when the driver focuses on a beam of light such as headlights and drives directly toward them.

√ *Experiencing "highway hypnosis"* or driving without awareness, losing a sense of motion and time passing, eyes glaze over, and the driver is unaware of road hazards.

√ *Decreased awareness* of surroundings including tunnel vision, wandering thoughts, and shorten attention span.

WHAT ARE SOME WAYS TO REDUCE THE EFFECTS OF DROWSY DRIVING AND DRIVER FATIGUE?

√ *Get plenty of sleep*. Start out well rested and travel during your normal awake hours.

√ *Set realistic goals.* The distance you plan to drive in the time you expect it to take should be reasonable.

√ *Share the driving.* Have one or two other drivers to take turns on longer trips. Trade off when the driver begins to feel drowsy or every two hours.

√ *Talk to other passengers.* If driving alone, you could also turn on the radio

√ *Take regular breaks.* Stop at least every two hours, get out of your vehicle, and walk around or stretch for ten minutes.

√ *Snack or chew gum.* A light snack but not "junk food", or gum can make you feel more alert for a short time. As with drinking caffeinated beverages, the effects may be short term and may cause even greater fatigue when they wear off.

√ *Avoid alcohol and drugs*. Alcohol, prescription and many over the counter drugs can increase fatigue.

√ *Turn down the heater.* Open a window for some fresh air and lower the cars interior heat. Cool air will help keep you more alert.

√ *Pay attention to the warning signs.* Admit when you're drowsy. You will KNOW when you should rest. Do it! Pull off in a rest stop or safe location for a 15-minute nap. Longer sleep breaks tend to intensify fatigue. If necessary, stay overnight and get the sleep you need to be an alert and safe driver.

Remember:

You might be a drowsy driver if ... no one has found an old report card but you have trouble keeping your head up ... you're not watching classic TV reruns but you can't stop yawning ... you didn't go to college in California but you have wandering or disconnected thoughts...

You need to ... get enough sleep before you drive ... travel during your normal awake time ... be alert to drowsiness ... talk to a passenger ... pull over at a rest stop and take a nap.