

Drowsy Driving Now Classified as Impaired Driving

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration now classifies drowsy driving as "impaired" driving, putting it in the same category as driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

The dangers of drowsy driving are real and the NHTSA estimates that it contributed to the deaths of 5,000 Americans last year. Drowsy-driving accidents cost an estimated \$109 billion a year in non-property damages, according to the Governors' Highway Safety Administration (GHSA).

These statistics are an important reminder of the dangers of drowsy driving, but also the need for motorists to recognize the signs.

While reports differ on the percentage of accidents caused by drowsy driving, safety officials across the nation agree that the problem is growing and must be addressed more aggressively.

Who is most susceptible?

According to the GHSA, teens and young adults face the highest risk of drowsy-driving crashes. Individuals in these age groups cause more than 50% of all such accidents each year.

Also, people who work irregular, long or late shifts are more likely to be in these accidents. More than 40 million Americans have sleep disorders, and they are also at a higher risk of causing an accident.

Danger signs

Whether fatigue is caused by sleep restriction due to a new baby waking every couple of hours, a late or long shift at work, hanging out late with friends, or a long and monotonous drive for the holidays, the negative outcomes can be the same.

Being able to recognize the signs of drowsiness is important.

Drowsiness can be more than just the eyelids feeling heavy. People may not even realize that their reactions are impaired when they lose a few hours of sleep each night.

The American Sleep Foundation identifies these as the other top warning signs of drowsy driving:

- Difficulty focusing on the road and blinking frequently.
- Difficulty remembering the past few miles driven or missing important signs and exits.
- Continual daydreaming or wandering thoughts.

- Repeatedly yawning or feeling the need to rub the eyes.
- Drifting out of the lane, getting too close to other vehicles or hitting a shoulder strip.
- Feeling irritable, becoming restless or having difficulty keeping the head up.

Prevention

The NHTSA recommends the following to avoid drowsy driving:

- Get adequate sleep on a daily basis (ideally seven to eight hours of sleep per night).
- Before the start of a long family car trip, get a good night's sleep.
- Advise your teens to delay driving until they're well-rested.
- Avoid drinking any alcohol before driving. Consumption of alcohol interacts with sleepiness to increase drowsiness and impairment.
- Always check your prescription and over-the-counter medication labels to see if drowsiness could result from their use.
- Avoid driving during the peak sleepiness periods (midnight to 6 a.m. and late afternoon). If you must drive during these periods, be extra vigilant for signs of drowsiness.

*This material was created by Insurance Newsletters and authorized for use by
Brown & Stromecki Agency

###