

## BIE SAFETY ADVISOR

**November 3<sup>rd</sup> through 10<sup>th</sup> is Driving Drowsy Prevention Week.** With the end of the favorable construction weather coming to an end, a lot of hours get put in to get as much accomplished as possible. It is a good time to reinforce that teams are rested and aware of the toll drowsy driving takes.

Sleepiness and driving is a dangerous combination. Most people are aware of the dangers of drinking and driving but don't realize that drowsy driving can be just as fatal. Like alcohol, sleepiness slows reaction time, decreases awareness, impairs judgment and increases your risk of crashing.

It's nearly impossible to determine with certainty the cause of a fatal crash where drowsy driving is suspected. However, there are a number of clues at a crash scene that tell investigators that the person fell asleep at the wheel. For example, drowsy driving accidents usually involve only one vehicle where the driver is alone and the injuries tend to be serious or fatal. Also, skid marks or evidence of other evasive maneuvers are usually absent from the drowsy driving crash scene.

Unlike alcohol-related crashes, no blood, breath, or other objective test for sleepiness behind the wheel currently exists that investigators could give to a driver at the scene of a crash. This makes police training in identifying drowsiness as a crash factor very difficult.

Definitions of drowsy driving or driver fatigue rely on how the concept of "fatigue" is defined. Fatigue is a general term

commonly used to describe the experience of being "sleepy," "tired," "drowsy," or "exhausted." While all of these terms have different meanings in research and clinical settings, they tend to be used interchangeably in the traffic safety and transportation fields.

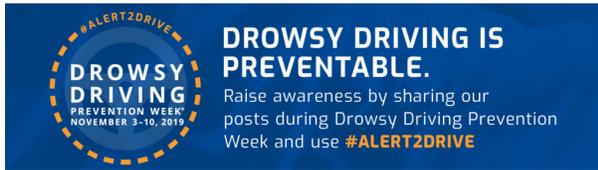
There are many underlying causes of sleepiness, fatigue and drowsy driving. Including sleep loss from restriction or too little sleep, interruption or fragmented sleep; chronic sleep debt; circadian factors associated with driving patterns or work schedules; undiagnosed or untreated sleep disorders; time spent on a task; the use of sedating medications; and the consumption of alcohol when already tired. These factors have cumulative effects and a combination of any of these can greatly increase one's risk for a fatigue-related crash.

Sleepiness or fatigue causes the following:

- Impaired reaction time, judgment and vision
- Problems with information processing and short-term memory
- Decreased performance, vigilance and motivation
- Increased moodiness and aggressive behaviors

In addition to the dangers of driving under the influence of fatigue, several states are considering legislation that would allow police to charge drowsy drivers with criminal negligence if they injure or kill someone while driving if they have not had adequate sleep.





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## Tool Box Talk

### Are You at Risk?

Before you drive, check to see if you are:

- Sleep-deprived or fatigued (6 hours of sleep or less triples your risk)
- Suffering from sleep loss (insomnia), poor quality sleep, or a sleep debt
- Driving long distances without proper rest breaks
- Driving through the night, midafternoon or when you would normally be asleep
- Taking sedating medications (antidepressants, cold tablets, antihistamines)
- Working more than 60 hours a week (increases your risk by 40%)
- Working more than one job and your main job involves shift work
- Drinking even small amounts of alcohol
- Driving alone or on a long, rural, dark or boring road

### How Can You Tell if You Are “Driving While Drowsy”?

Here are some signs that should tell a driver to stop and rest:

- Difficulty focusing, frequent blinking, or heavy eyelids
- Daydreaming; wandering/disconnected thoughts
- Trouble remembering the last few miles driven; missing exits or traffic signs
- Yawning repeatedly or rubbing your eyes
- Trouble keeping your head up
- Drifting from your lane, tailgating, or hitting a shoulder rumble strip
- Feeling restless and irritable

