

Drowsy Driving

Most people are aware that drunk driving is dangerous, but don't realize that drowsy driving can be just as dangerous. Drowsy driving or sleep-deprived driving is defined "as operation of a motor vehicle while being cognitively impaired by a lack of sleep". Being sleep impaired behind the wheel slows reaction times, decreases awareness, impairs judgment, and increases the chances of an accident.

A poll by the National Sleep Foundation found that 60% of Americans have driven while drowsy and 37% have actually fallen asleep while driving. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administrations estimates that approximately 100,000 police-reported crashes are caused by drowsy driving each year and that 1,550 deaths, 71,000 injuries, and \$12.5 billion in monetary losses are caused by drowsy driving annually.

Why People Drowsy Drive

There are numerous reasons while people drowsy drive. According to the Centers for Disease Control, 35% of Americans do not get the recommended 7 hours of sleep per night. This can lead to a chronic sleep debt that negatively impacts health and is associated with an increased risk for obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure, and other chronic conditions as well as making it more likely that a person may get behind the wheel while fatigue impaired.

Other reasons people drowsy drive are because of circadian factors associated with driving patterns or work schedules (i.e., people are more likely to drowsy drive late at night or early in the morning when our internal body clocks are wired to be sleeping). The use of sedating medications, untreated sleep disorders, or the use of alcohol when already tired are all things that contribute to drowsy driving.

Combating Drowsy Driving

The most effective way to combat drowsy driving is by getting enough sleep each night to maintain proper alertness behind the wheel. For most adults that means getting between 7 to 9 hours of sleep each night. If driving long distances, stop and take a break every 2 hours or about every hundred miles. Having a travel companion on long trips can also help increase alertness. Avoid drinking alcohol or taking any medications that may cause drowsiness.

Know When to Stop

Below are some behaviors that indicate drowsy driving. If you experience these behaviors find a place to pullover 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

What This Means for Counties

Drowsy driving greatly increases the risks of an accident as well as increasing insurance costs and endangering the lives of county employees. Be sure that county employees recognize the signs of drowsy driving and know when to pull over. For more information on drowsy driving or driving safety, contact CTSI at 303 861 0507. 