

Managing Driver Fatigue

Driver fatigue significantly increases the risk of a crash. Crashes which result from fatigue are caused by a driver's loss of alertness which is accompanied by poor judgement, slower reaction times and decreased skill levels (Beaulieu, 2005).

Fatigue related accidents also tend to be more severe in nature with these crashes three times more likely to involve a fatality than crashes which are non fatigue-related (Williamson & Boufous, 2007).

The reasons for a loss in concentration and driving ability are numerous but lack of sleep; time of day and time on task are the key contributing determinants.

If as a driver you notice any of the following symptoms whilst driving then it's time to cease driving immediately:

- ▼ Trouble focusing, or keeping attention
- ▼ Head nodding, or inability to keep the eyes open
- ▼ Forgetting the last few minutes
- ▼ Poor judgment
- ▼ Slower reaction time
- ▼ "Zoning out" or becoming oblivious to your surroundings
- ▼ Daydreaming and wandering thoughts
- ▼ Constant yawning or rubbing your eyes
- ▼ Drifting in the lane

Some helpful hints to avoid the onset of driver fatigue include:

- ▼ Being well rested. Good quality and quantity of sleep.
- ▼ Avoid if possible travelling at times in which you normally would be asleep. The alertness and performance of drivers has been found to reduce during this time.
- ▼ Eat small meals before driving as large meals can cause drowsiness;
- ▼ Drink plenty of water;
- ▼ Avoid using the heater as it can make you feel drowsy – keep your vehicle at a comfortable temperature. In cool conditions direct warmth to your feet and open the window a little to allow fresh air on your face;
- ▼ Keep your mind active by listening to the radio while driving;
- ▼ Avoid sedative drugs.
- ▼ If you feel you are nodding off, stop in a safe area, stretch your legs and if possible have a 15 to 30 minute power nap;
- ▼ If you have a passenger (licensed and authorised to drive), rotate driving every 2 hours.
- ▼ Provide extra consideration for shift or overtime workers as these drivers are more likely to be involved in a fatigue related crash.

Fatigue Facts:

An individual losing just two hours of sleep will experience decreased reaction times, cognitive functioning, memory, mood and alertness. (Dobbie, 2002).

A person who has driven more than eight hours has the equivalent crash risk of a driver with a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of 0.05% (Jones & Stein, cited in Haworth, 2002).

Driver safety experts have estimated that 20 to 30 per cent of fatal road crash fatalities would involve some aspect of driver fatigue (HORSCIOCTA, 2000)

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