



U.S. ARMY COMBAT READINESS/SAFETY CENTER

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Resource Document Driving Safety *Drowsy Driving*

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Narrative:

There is no substitute for sleep when it comes to remaining alert and aware. However, many Americans fail to get the needed sleep and drive drowsy, putting themselves and other motorists in harms' way. Because these accidents typically happen at high speeds, drivers who nod-off behind the wheel often wake up in an emergency room — if they wake up at all.

How widespread is the problem? The National Sleep Foundation conducted a poll in 2005 to look at the issue. Sixty percent of respondents said they'd driven drowsy during the previous year with 37 percent admitted to having fallen asleep on the road. More startling was 13 percent reported nodding off on at least a monthly basis!

Drowsy driving contributes to the carnage on America's highways. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration conservatively estimates drowsy drivers cause at least 100,000 police-reported crashes each year. But that number may only be the tip of the iceberg. Unlike drunk-driving crashes where a breathalyzer can determine the driver's impairment, there is no way to measure how sleepy a driver was at the time.

There are; however, certain common features to drowsy driving crashes. Typically, these are single-vehicle accidents lacking skid marks or other indications that the driver tried to take evasive maneuvers. Because these drivers do nothing to avoid the collision, impacts tend to be very violent and cause serious or fatal injuries.

However, responsible drivers can gauge their own alertness and avoid making it into the statistics column. Hints that the "sand man" is nearby are easy enough to notice. Drivers having difficulty focusing, frequently blinking or noticing their eyelids getting heavy may be getting dangerously near

the drowsy driving zone. In addition, other clues include daydreaming or wandering, disconnected thoughts; difficulty remembering the last few miles, missing exits or traffic signs and yawning or rubbing eyes. Drowsy drivers may have trouble staying in their lane or find themselves tailgating or hitting shoulder rumble strips. Drivers need to be alert to feelings of restlessness and irritability.

Key Messages:

- Drowsy driving is costly in terms of lives. Each year an estimated 1,550 people are killed and another 71,000 injured in accidents caused by drowsy drivers.
- Those most vulnerable to driving fatigued includes adults between ages 18 and 29 — with males being at much higher risk; adults with children in their household, shift workers and people with undiagnosed sleep disorders such as apnea or acute insomnia.
- How long a person sleeps matters. The American Automobile Association found drivers who only get six to seven hours' sleep per night were twice as likely to experience fatigue-related accidents. For drivers getting less than five hours' sleep, the risk increases to four to five times that of a properly rested driver.
- Drowsy driving accidents are often produce serious or fatal injuries as drivers neither slow down nor take evasive maneuvers before the crash.

Talking points:

- Driving fatigued is a dangerous choice. While most people recognize the dangers of driving under the influence, many do not understand that fatigue can be just as crippling to a driver's skills.
- Drivers who get eight or more hours' sleep dramatically reduce their vulnerability to a drowsy driving accident.
- Fatigue-related crashes often lead to fatalities because drowsy drivers typically fail to slow down or maneuver to avoid an accident.
- Certain groups of drivers are more vulnerable to drowsy driving. Those include younger drivers between ages 18 and 29 years old — especially males, adults with children in their homes, shift workers and people suffering from sleep apnea or acute insomnia.
- Because more often than not a fatigued driver is alone in a vehicle, they must be alert to any symptoms that fatigue is impairing their driving skills.

Tips:

The National Sleep Foundation offers the following countermeasures to prevent drowsy-driving accidents on the highway:

Before Driving

- Get adequate sleep — most adults need seven to nine hours to maintain proper alertness during the day.
- Schedule proper breaks — about every 100 miles or two hours during long trips.
- Arrange for a travel companion — someone to talk with and share the driving.
- Avoid alcohol and sedating medications — check your labels or ask your doctor.

While Driving

- Stop at night if you find yourself drowsy behind the wheel. If you plan to stop for more than 30 minutes, find a hotel and select a room where you will not be disturbed by the sounds of elevators, ice machines or vehicles on nearby roads.
- Take a 15- to 20-minute nap to help improve mood, performance and short-term alertness. Be aware that longer naps can result in sleep inertia, leaving you groggy and disoriented.
- Drink coffee or another type of caffeinated drink to promote short-term alertness. Be aware it takes about 30 minutes for caffeine to enter the bloodstream. Caffeine also is available in soft drinks, chewing gum and tablets. Keep in mind caffeine will not have much of an effect on people who consume it regularly.
- If you hit a rumble strip, pull off the road as soon as possible. Rumble strips, which are deep

grooves placed on high-speed roads, are designed to alert drowsy drivers they're about to veer off the road.

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

Historical Reference:

<https://safety.army.mil/>

<http://www.nhtsa.gov/>

<http://drowsydriving.org/>

Statistics:

- Drowsy drivers cause 100,000 crashes every year
- More than half — 55 percent — of drowsy driving crashes are caused by drivers less than 25 years old.
- Being awake for 18 hours is equal to a blood alcohol concentration of 0.08 percent, which is legally drunk.
- Each year an estimated 1,550 people are killed and another 71,000 injured in accidents caused by drowsy drivers.

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