Tailgate Safety Talk

Drowsy Driving

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates sleepiness causes more than 100,000 vehicle crashes, 1,500 fatalities, 71,000 injuries and $12.5 billion in economic costs each year. Americans are often reminded about the seriousness of drinking and driving - what many do not know is that tired drivers are just as dangerous. The American Automobile Association (AAA) recently reported the top 10 driver errors and listed "drowsiness" at #2, just behind "distractions". The AAA report states that drowsiness, dozing off, entering the early stages of sleep, and/or switching off for micro sleeps lasting more than a second are implicated in up to 40 percent of serious accidents, substantially higher than the 32 percent ascribed to drinking and driving.

Drowsy Driving Statistics:

- Death rates based on mileage were 2.5 times higher at night than during the day in 2002.
- 37% of drivers surveyed by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration admitted to falling asleep at the wheel at some point in their driving career.
  - 60% admitted falling asleep while driving on an interstate-type highway with posted speeds of 55 MPH or higher.
  - 8% admitted doing so in the past six months
- The drivers at highest risk are: third shift workers, people that drive a substantial number of miles each day, those with unrecognized sleep disorders, and those prescribed medication with sedatives.

Risk Factors – Drowsy Driving (Everyone's at Risk)

Sleep is a natural function of the human body. When a person's circadian rhythms-the body cycles that tell a person when to eat and sleep-become disrupted, several potentially dangerous things can occur. Sleepiness affects reaction time, attention and information processing—all critical aspects of safe driving.

Certain characteristics or events greatly increase the risk of falling asleep at the wheel.

- Gender and age—young people between the ages of 16 and 29 are more susceptible to fall asleep crashes (with young men being particularly vulnerable).
- Disrupted sleep patterns caused by late-night, long or irregular working hours.
- Untreated or unrecognized sleep disorders such as sleep apnea and narcolepsy.
- Sedating medications.
- Consumption of alcohol (even in small, moderate amounts).
- Driving patterns, including time of day (midnight to 6 a.m. and mid-afternoon are especially dangerous) and the number of miles/hours traveled per day or trip.

It is important to recognize the warning signs that sleepiness is sneaking up and a driver feeling tired should stop to rest or take a coffee break if:
• Eyes close or go out of focus.
• Head becomes heavy and begins to bob.
• Excessive yawning.
• Thoughts begin to wander or become disconnected.
• Drifting between lanes, tailgating or missing traffic signs begins to occur.
• Car needs to be suddenly jerked back into driving lane.

Some of the most common ways to **prevent drowsy driving** include:
• Getting plenty of good, quality sleep before leaving.
• Avoiding driving between midnight and 6 a.m.
• Driving with someone else who is awake in the front seat.
• Taking frequent breaks every two hours, include a 15-20 minute nap if needed.
• Drinking caffeine equivalent to two cups of coffee.
• Avoid even small amounts of alcohol.
• Not assuming that opening a window or playing loud music will help - these methods have not been proven.
• Help make America's roads safer for everyone. Don't drive drowsy.

References:
CountryRoads Network - [http://www.countryroads.net](http://www.countryroads.net)
Dutchess County Traffic Safety Board
NY State Assoc. of Traffic Safety Boards

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