

5 tips to help prevent drowsy driving.



According to the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health, car accidents account for 24% of all work-related deaths. And drowsy driving is considered the leading cause of these fatalities. So, business owners, beware.

What is drowsy driving?

When the one behind the wheel is too tired, they're a drowsy driver. And, most importantly, a dangerous driver. Drowsy driving can lead to slower reaction times, reduced attentiveness and impaired thinking. And in the most extreme cases, drowsy driving can even lead to people falling asleep.

In the last 30 days, an estimated 1 in 25 people have fallen asleep while driving. –
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

What causes drowsy driving?

Aside from inadequate or interrupted sleep, drivers can feel drowsy for a lot of reasons, including:

- A demanding work or home schedule
- A sleeping disorder, like insomnia or narcolepsy
- The use of prescription drugs like sedatives or sleep aids
- Consumption of alcohol or narcotics
- Driving without a sufficient rest period

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has also identified a few factors commonly associated with drowsy driving crashes. This includes driving between midnight and 6 a.m., or in the

late afternoon (when there are dips in circadian rhythm), driving with no passengers, and driving on rural roads and highways.

What are the warning signs of drowsy driving?

If drivers notice any of the following signals, they could be drowsy driving.

- Trouble keeping eyes open and/or head up
- Yawning frequently
- Feeling restless and/or irritable
- Daydreaming and/or difficulty focusing
- Difficulty remembering the last few miles
- Drifting from their lane
- Missing signs, turns or exits
- Driving too close to other cars
- Hitting a rumble strip on the side of the road

How can you help prevent drowsy driving?

All business owners should promote these five tips to their commercial drivers:

1. **Get a good night's sleep.** Of course, the easiest way to ditch drowsiness is to get an adequate amount of sleep. Experts at the National Sleep Foundation recommend all adults (ages 26-64) sleep seven to nine hours every night.
2. **Stick to a sleep schedule.** Sleeping at the same time can maintain the timing of the body's internal clock – which will help people fall asleep and wake up more easily. According to Harvard Medical School, a regular sleep schedule not only tends to increase the amount of sleep people get each night, it can also improve the quality of that sleep.
3. **Take breaks.** Commercial drivers should plan on stopping once every two hours or every 100 miles. A quick stop can help promote clarity – even if it's just to get something to eat or drink, or to use the restroom.
4. **Create a safe resting space.** During long hauls, drivers will have to stop for sleep. Whether it's for the night or for a nap, they should always park in a quiet, secure place. They can use ear plugs or a white noise machine, and they should block light with truck shades or an eye mask. To accommodate their body's changing temperature, they should also try to keep the cab cool.
5. **Be careful with caffeine.** Caffeine can certainly increase alertness, but it's no substitute for sleep. Instead, drivers should use it as a short-term boost to get them where they're going. Their favorite coffee, tea or soda will take about 30 minutes to enter their bloodstream, and the effects will last two to three hours. To maximize the effects, they can take a 20-minute nap afterwards.

(Hint: You can also require the driver to log their hours – ensuring they're getting adequate rest while on the road.)

Are your employees at risk of drowsy driving? Pass along this 12-question quiz from the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration. For extra credit, talk to an agent about your commercial auto

coverage.