

## Drowsy driving:

# Unmasking the hidden danger on our roads

Drowsy driving is operating a commercial ag or farm vehicle while sleepy, fatigued, or exhausted. These drivers are especially dangerous because, by the time they realize they have fallen asleep, it may be too late for them and others in their path.

## Factors that contribute to drowsy driving

When a driver begins to show evidence of micro-napping, the root cause can often be traced to one or more of the following factors:

- Driving at night after being awake since early morning.
- Driving for prolonged periods without taking a break especially during intense driving situations like heavy traffic or severe weather conditions.
- Working a constantly changing schedule that interferes with getting a good night's sleep.
- Having undiagnosed or untreated sleep disorders such as obstructive sleep apnea.
- Consuming alcohol prior to driving.
- Use of OTC medications that cause drowsiness.
- Experiencing poor quality sleep or a general lack of sleep.

Some factors that make matters even worse for drowsy drivers are:

- Driving just prior to dawn.
- Exposure to extreme temperatures, vibration and loud or pervasive background noise.
- Poor physical condition.
- Prolonged periods of emotional upset.

## Some tips to help your drivers stay safe

As a fleet manager who understands the causes of drowsy driving, you can take measures to prevent it. Before drivers begin their trips, make sure they are following hours of service regulations if applicable. Also, prepare them with effective tips and advise them to be cautious. By encouraging the following behaviors, you can help ensure that your drivers will be wide awake and prepared for any distance they are required to travel:

- **Exercise en route:** Take breaks to walk and stretch.
- **Drive in pairs:** Conversations with a companion help maintain focus.
- **Maintain good posture:** Stay alert by sitting properly.
- **Take medications responsibly:** Consult a doctor and be cautious with meds. Read OTC labels carefully for ingredients that cause drowsiness.
- **Take regular breaks:** Rest every two hours during long trips.

Also, remind your drivers of the building blocks of a healthy lifestyle:

- Proper nutrition.
- A calm and quiet sleep environment.
- A consistent amount of sleep each night.
- Enrollment in a fitness program.
- Establishing and maintaining a targeted weight.
- Avoiding regular or heavy consumption of caffeinated beverages, nicotine, and alcohol (each can interfere with restorative sleep).

Managing your fleet means securing your business's property, but it is also about protecting your employees. Falling asleep at the wheel can be avoided when drivers are informed and aware.

## References

- Drowsy Driving. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. <https://www.nhtsa.gov/risky-driving/drowsy-driving>
- Your Guide to Healthy Sleep Fact Sheet. National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. 2011. <https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/resources/brief-your-guide-healthy-sleep-fact-sheet>
- Asleep at the Wheel: A National Compendium of efforts to eliminate drowsy driving. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. 2017. [https://www.nhtsa.gov/sites/nhtsa.gov/files/documents/12723-drowsy\\_driving\\_asleep\\_at\\_the\\_wheel\\_031917\\_v4b\\_tag.pdf](https://www.nhtsa.gov/sites/nhtsa.gov/files/documents/12723-drowsy_driving_asleep_at_the_wheel_031917_v4b_tag.pdf)



For assistance with risk management services or safety resources,  
contact us at [RMSolutions@nationwide.com](mailto:RMSolutions@nationwide.com) or 1-800-260-1356.