

TOOLBOX TALKS

A Quality Service Contractors Publication for Members

March 2015

Driver Fatigue

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With just-in-time shipping schedules and a 24-hour workplace, driver fatigue is a major problem in industry today. Drowsy drivers are involved in many fatal traffic incidents, frequently taking occupants of other vehicles with them.

The statistics are staggering and the more time you spend on the road; the greater the odds are that you'll be involved in such an incident. On-the-job driving involves heavy responsibility, so make sure you get enough rest to drive alert.

Here are some tips for staying awake and aware when you drive for your job, to and from work or on your own time:

- Get enough sleep before you drive. For most people, eight hours of sleep every 24 hours is about right, but everyone is different.
- If you have a choice, don't drive during your normal sleeping hours. If you are accustomed to being asleep at 2 a.m. you could easily doze off behind the wheel at that hour.
- If you start to get sleepy, pull off the road in a safe place and take a nap. Be sure to lock your vehicle doors and be prepared to drive away promptly if your security is threatened.
- Plan your route with overnight accommodations or highway rest areas in mind. Make reservations at a motel, or have alternative accommodation lined up. Vacationers can use sources such as an automobile association to locate rest areas. Planning these stops in advance keeps you from driving around tired looking for a place to spend the night.
- Eat lightly and often rather than larger meals. The meat and potato platter, dessert included, at the truck stop can make you sleepy.
- Avoid alcoholic beverages and other drugs. Even ordinary medications such as cold and cough remedies can contain ingredients to make you drowsy.
- Keep your vehicle interior fairly cool with plenty of fresh air.
- Shift position frequently. instead of remaining static for long periods of time.
- Take breaks at least every two hours. Walk around in the fresh air for a while instead of just walking from your vehicle to a warm coffee shop. A fast paced walk around the rest area can do wonders to get your circulation going again to keep you alert.



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- Switch with your co-driver every couple of hours. You can also ask your co-driver to stay awake to keep you company and keep an extra set of eyes on the road.
- If you are alone, use your radio, tape or CD player for company.
- Keep your eyes moving. Look at the road and traffic far ahead, check your mirrors often and scan the sides of the road.
- Check your instrument panel often, making sure your speed is within posted limits and not becoming erratic because of fatigue or inattention. Consider turning your instrument lights down low to keep your eyes adjusted to the darkness outside.

What other things have you found to be successful in keeping you alert while driving?

Remember the only substitute for sleep is sleep. Short-term measures may help you stay alert for a while, but eventually you will need to sleep, even if you are behind the wheel of a vehicle.

Fatigue is the condition of being physically or mentally tired or exhausted. Extreme fatigue can lead to uncontrolled and involuntary shutdown of the brain.

Fortunately, there are ways to fight fatigue:

- Get eight hours of sleep before starting work.
- Sleep at the same time each day. If they rotate shifts, establish clockwise rotations (from day to evening to night). Clockwise rotating makes it easier to go to sleep when a worker goes to bed.
- Take all scheduled work breaks. A snack or exercise during the break will refresh them.
- When trying to sleep during the daytime, find a cool, dark, quiet location. Use earplugs, soft music, or a fan to block out noise.
- See their doctor about sleep disorders, medications for illness, and using bright light on the job or during waking hours.
- Eat a well-balanced diet beginning the “day” with high protein foods and ending with carbohydrates. Do not eat great quantities before bedtime; they may cause trouble sleeping.
- Avoid caffeine, alcohol, and cigarettes. These substances cause sleep disturbances.
- Walking, stretching, and aerobics can help a person stay awake. Exercise will give you stamina and help you to fall asleep later.
- Work carefully and very methodically, always following proper procedures.

When you're fatigued **you will make errors in judgment**. Your mind or eyes can be off task and you can make a critical error.



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