Awake, Alert and Alive

Safety Talk

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 crashes, frequently taking occupants of other vehicles with them. 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. 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 awhile instead of just walking from your vehicle to a warm coffee shop.
- 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. Observe all traffic signs.
- 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.

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