Dangers of Drowsy Driving Meeting Kit

DROWSY DRIVING IS COMMON

While there is no exact measure of drowsy driving, research indicates that it is disturbingly common. The National Sleep Foundation's 2005 Sleep in America Poll found that 60% of adult drivers reported driving while drowsy in the past year. Survey data from the CDC indicated that one in every 25 adults had fallen asleep behind the wheel in the past month.

DANGERS OF DROWSY DRIVING

Drowsy driving is a major contributor to motor vehicle collisions. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), in 2017 drowsy driving led to at least 91,000 crashes, resulting in roughly 50,000 injuries and 800 deaths.

Drowsy driving significantly increases the risk of car accidents. Microsleeps are when a person dozes off for just a few seconds, and when they occur while driving, it's easy for the car to run off the road or collide with another vehicle.

Drowsy driving is dangerous even if a person doesn't actually fall asleep. Research shows that sleep deprivation leads to mental impairment that is similar to drunkenness with 24 hours of sleep deprivation roughly equating to a blood alcohol content (BAC) of 0.10%.

SYMPTOMS OF A DROWSY DRIVER

- Daydreaming, disconnected thoughts
- Driving while drowsy increases your chance of causing a traffic accident.
- Yawning, can't keep head up

- Frequent blinking, heavy eyelids, rubbing eyes
- No memory of the last few miles
- Difficulty focusing on the road
- Drifting from lane to lane, tailgating, or grazing the shoulder of the road or rumble strip
- Missing exits and street signs (a major telltale sign of fatigue and drowsiness)

AVOID DROWSY DRIVING

Before Driving

- **Plan ahead to limit total driving hours:** As much as possible, break your trip into smaller segments and don't depend on extremely long days of driving.
- **Avoid driving during the drowsiest times of day:** Your body's internal clock will usually make you sleepier between midnight and six a.m. and in the early afternoon, so try to reduce your need to drive during those times.
- **Budget time for rest:** Make sure to build in time for multiple stops along the way so that you can recharge.
- **Get a good night's sleep:** Focus on getting plenty of sleep the night before your trip and ideally for multiple nights leading up to driving.
- **Avoid alcohol and other sedatives:** These substances can interfere with quality sleep and may leave you drowsy the next day.
- **Bring a travel companion:** Most drowsy driving occurs when people are traveling by themselves, so if possible, have someone join you who can share driving duties and help keep you alert.

While You're Driving

- **Watch for warning signs:** If you notice any feelings of sleepiness or symptoms of drowsy driving, look for an immediate opportunity to stop and rest.
- **Utilize caffeine:** Caffeine is a stimulant that can make you more alert for a few hours; however, it isn't a cure-all.

When caffeine wears off, you'll likely get sleepy again, and more caffeine may have diminishing returns.

- **Be wary of "tricks" to stay awake:** Some people try fiddling with their windows, air conditioning, or radio to stay awake, but this can draw your attention away from the road. Instead of using these tricks, it's better to stop and let your body get the rest it needs.

SLEEP HABITS AND FATIGUE

Over the long-term, good sleep is the best protection against drowsy driving. Focusing on sleep hygiene, which includes your habits and sleep setting, can enable better sleep every night.

Examples of sleep hygiene include maintaining a stable sleep schedule, limiting the use of electronic devices before bed, and making sure that your bedroom is quiet, dark, and conducive to uninterrupted rest.

In addition to sleep hygiene improvements, you should talk with a doctor if you have persistent or severe problems with falling or staying asleep or if you regularly have daytime sleepiness.

Fatigue has costly effects on the safety, health, and quality of life of the American public. Whether fatigue is caused by sleep restriction due to a new baby waking every couple of hours, a late or long shift at work, hanging out late with friends, or a long and monotonous drive for the holidays – the negative outcomes can be the same. These include impaired cognition and performance, motor vehicle crashes, workplace accidents, and health consequences.

CAFFEINE – SHORT TERM SOLUTION

Drinking coffee or energy drinks alone is not always enough. They might help you feel more alert, but the effects last only a short time, and you might not be as alert as you think you are. If you drink coffee and are seriously sleep-deprived, you still may have "micro sleeps" or brief losses of consciousness that can last for

four or five seconds. This means that at 55 miles per hour, you've traveled more than 100 yards down the road while asleep. That's plenty of time to cause a crash.

FINAL WORD

Get a full eight hours of sleep. One common misconception is that as long as an individual gets some sleep, they will not suffer from fatigue. The NSF has found that most people who don't get the recommended hours of sleep are twice as likely to drive drowsy than those who do.