

DROWSY DRIVING CRASHES: PREVALENT AND PREVENTABLE

National Sleep Foundation Releases Safety Guidelines for Drowsy Driving Prevention Week®

(Phoenix, AZ) Monday, November 8th, 2010, kicks off Drowsy Driving Prevention Week®, a National Sleep Foundation public awareness campaign to educate drivers about sleep safety. The [AAA Foundation](#) for Traffic Safety released a new study showing that the tragedy of drowsy driving is more pervasive than shown in previous estimates. Their study shows that drowsy driving involves about one in eight deadly crashes; one in ten crashes resulting in occupant hospitalization, and one in twenty crashes in which a vehicle was towed. These percentages are substantially higher than most previous estimates, suggesting that the contribution of drowsy driving to motor vehicle crashes, injuries, and deaths has not been fully appreciated.

“Drowsy driving is no laughing matter,” says Lauri Leadley President of Valley Sleep Center. “Thousands of people fall asleep at the wheel and cause tragic accidents on our roads every year.”

According to the Foundation’s 2009 Sleep in America poll, about one-third (28%) of Americans admitted that they have fallen asleep behind the wheel within the past year, and more than half (54%) said they have driven while drowsy. The AAA Foundation study shows that more than a quarter of surveyed adults admitted they drove despite being so tired that they had difficulty keeping their eyes open in the previous month.

“It is shocking that so many people admit that they frequently drive in an incapacitated state,” says Leadley. “The good news is that drowsy-driving crashes are preventable. The bad news is that there is a knowledge and awareness gap about the danger of driving when you’re too sleepy. Many people think they can will themselves to stay awake no matter how tired they are, but science shows us that simply isn’t true.”

Sleepiness can impair drivers by causing slower reaction times, vision impairment, lapses in judgment and delays in processing information. In fact, studies show that being awake for more than 20 hours results in an impairment equal to a blood alcohol concentration of 0.08%, the legal limit in all states. It is also possible to fall into a 3-4 second microsleep without realizing it.

“Drowsy driving is a major traffic safety problem that, unfortunately, is largely unrecognized,” said AAA Foundation President and CEO Peter Kissinger. “We need to change the culture so that drivers recognize the dangers, appreciate the consequences and most importantly, stop driving while sleepy.”



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Feeling sleepy? Stop driving if you exhibit these warning signs.

The following warning signs indicate that it's time to stop driving and find a safe place to pull over and address your condition:

- Difficulty focusing, frequent blinking and/or heavy eyelids
- Difficulty keeping reveries or daydreams at bay
- Trouble keeping your head up
- Drifting from your lane, swerving, tailgating and/or hitting rumble strips
- Inability to clearly remember the last few miles driven
- Missing exits or traffic signs
- Yawning repeatedly
- Feeling restless, irritable, or aggressive.

Here's what you can do to prevent a fall-asleep crash:

- **Get a good night's sleep before you hit the road.** You'll want to be alert for the drive, so be sure to get adequate sleep (seven to nine hours) the night before you go.
- **Don't be too rushed to arrive at your destination.** Many drivers try to maximize the holiday weekend by driving at night or without stopping for breaks. It's better to allow the time to drive alert and arrive alive.
- **Use the buddy system.** Just as you should not swim alone, avoid driving alone for long distances. A buddy who remains awake for the journey can take a turn behind the wheel and help identify the warning signs of fatigue.
- Take a break every 100 miles or 2 hours. Do something to refresh yourself like getting a snack, switching drivers, or going for a run.
- **Take a nap**—find a safe place to take a 15 to 20-minute nap, if you think you might fall asleep. Be cautious about excessive drowsiness after waking up.
- **Avoid alcohol and medications that cause drowsiness as a side-effect.**
- **Avoid driving at times when you would normally be asleep.**
- **Consume caffeine.** The equivalent of two cups of coffee can increase alertness for several hours.

For more information about drowsy driving, visit the National Sleep Foundation's drowsy driving website at www.DrowsyDriving.org.



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Drowsy Driving Prevention Week®

In an effort to reduce the number of fatigue-related crashes and to save lives, the National Sleep Foundation is declaring November 8-14, 2010 to be Drowsy Driving Prevention Week®. This annual campaign provides public education about the under-reported risks of driving while drowsy and countermeasures to improve safety on the road.

About Valley Sleep Center:

Since 2002, Valley Sleep Center, accredited by the American Academy of Sleep Medicine, has provided Arizona with diagnostic sleep disorder testing in a home-like atmosphere, ensuring a comfortable, relaxing experience for patients. Their Board Certified Sleep Medicine Specialists consist of experienced and knowledgeable physicians who provide expert advice across a multitude of sleep related disorders including insomnia, sleep apnea, snoring, excessive daytime sleepiness, hypertension, sleepwalking, and pediatric sleep problems. They accept most insurance plans as well as Medicare. For more information contact Lauri Leadley at 480-830-3900; <http://www.valleysleepcenter.com>.



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