

Are You Too Tired To Get Behind The Wheel?

By Drew Hinton, President/CEO of Arrow Safety, LLC

We've all heard the phrase "safety first" on at least one occasion. But what about "sleep first"? What if we told you that drowsy driving is responsible for more than 100,000 crashes and more than 6,400 deaths in the United States every single year? If we told you to sleep more, would you argue? Most people would gladly take this advice, with some claiming it as an "OSHA-approved safety break". But how many of us can accurately determine when we're too tired to perform a task in the workplace? Many of us, at some point, have been guilty of driving somewhere and not remembering the time in between point "A" and point "B" (a sign of microsleep). So, how tired is "too tired"? Is there a threshold of when we should refuse to drive? Does it vary from one person to another? Yes, yes, and lastly...yes!

November 7-14 is Drowsy Driving Prevention Week, sponsored by the National Sleep Foundation. In this month's newsletter, we will be discussing some of the common myths about drowsy driving, facts and statistics to share with your coworkers, and how you can improve your organization's fatigue management program (if you have one).

Would You Drink and Drive?

Wait...what? I thought we were talking about being sleepy here? Well, there's an eye-opening correlation between driving impaired and driving when you're too tired. According to a [2000 study](#), after being awake for 17-19 hours without sleep, performance on some cognitive and motor performance tests was equivalent or worse than that at a blood alcohol content (BAC) of 0.05%. Responses speeds were up to 50% slower, and after longer periods without sleep, performance reached levels equivalent to a BAC of 0.10%. [A 1994 publication](#) by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism stated that certain skills important for driving are impaired at 0.01 to 0.02% BAC, the lowest levels that can be measured reliably by commonly used devices.

The legal limit for blood alcohol content (BAC) is 0.08%. Let that sink in for a little bit...

If you're guilty of this, you're not alone. A [2015 study](#) found that out of 1,000 men and women across the



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country, 34% of the people admitted to driving after being awake for 17-19 hours. Not sure if you're guilty of this? Let's do the math and help you find out!

Let's say you work a normal 8am-5pm schedule five days a week. Your time at work alone consists of 9 hours awake already. Now let's take into account getting up at 6am to begin getting ready for work (now you're at 11 hours awake). Unless you take a nap in your car or office during lunch break (which I've done from time to time to help reduce fatigue), then you will get off work at 5pm and head home for the day. Once you've been home, started dinner, and relaxed for a bit, you've easily added another hour of being awake, bringing your total to 12 hours so far. Binge watching a new show on Hulu? There's two more hours down the drain (especially if it's *The Office* or *Modern Family*). Your new total is now at 14 hours for the day.



Do you workout or go to the gym? An average workout takes approximately one hour during the workout, then 15-30 minutes to get to the gym, depending on where you live and how far you have to go. Needless to say, your 1-hour workout can easily turn into two additional hours of being awake once you factor in travel time, bringing you to a grand total of....*drum roll please*....**16 hours awake!** We just mentioned that at 17 hours awake, you're at the equivalent of a 0.05 BAC. What if your workday runs late because you're trying to meet a deadline and you don't get off work until 6 or 7pm? What if you're getting a massive "pump" at the gym and end up stretching the workout another 30 minutes longer? It may be the simple drive home at the end of the day when it's night time and you're fatigued that puts you over the edge, causing you to drive impaired, placing your life and others at risk.

Tips for Staying Alert and Preventing Drowsy Driving

Sleepiness can slow down your reaction time, decrease awareness, impair judgment, and increase your risk of crashing. Whenever you are getting ready to drive, ask yourself, "Am I alert enough to operate a 3,000-pound moving machine on public roads?"

Before getting into the car with someone or driving yourself, ask the following:

- Are you sleep-deprived or fatigued? Are you suffering regularly from sleep problems? Less than 6 hours of sleep **triples** your risk of falling asleep while driving!
- Are you planning to drive long distances without proper rest breaks?
- Will you be driving through the night, mid-afternoon, or when you would normally be asleep?
- Are you taking medications that can make you sleepy such as antidepressants, cold tablets, or antihistamines?
- Have you been working for more than 60 hours a week? A tightly-packed work schedule increases your risk of drowsy driving by 40%.
- Have you been working more than one job and your main job involves shift work?
- Did you drink alcohol? Even a small amount of alcohol can have an impact on your body.

Be proactive. Plan every short and long trip ahead of time. Ask a friend to join you on long-distance drives, so that your companion can help look for early warning signs of driver fatigue and switch drivers when needed.

8 Drowsy Driving Warning Signs to Watch For:

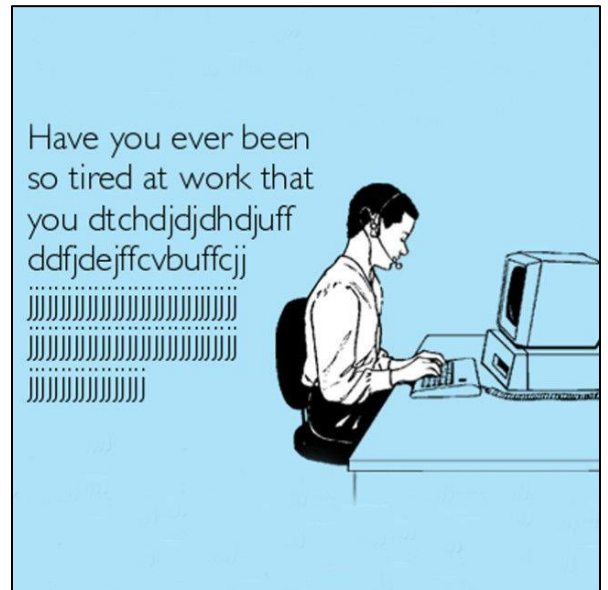
- Finding it hard to focus on the road, frequent blinking, or heavy eyelids
- Starting to daydream, wandering eyes, and have disconnected thoughts
- Having trouble remembering the last few miles driven
- Missing an exit or ignoring traffic signs
- Yawning repeatedly or rubbing your eyes
- Finding it hard to keep your head up or nodding off
- Drifting from your lane, tailgating, or hitting a shoulder rumble strip
- Feeling restless and irritable, or becoming aggravated with common annoyances such as sitting in traffic.

If you notice these warning signs for drowsy driving, pull over to a safe place and get some rest, stretch, or drink a caffeinated beverage. Continue driving when you feel alert and refreshed.

Specific At-Risk Groups for Driving Sleep-Deprived

Some groups of drivers are at greater risk for drowsy-driving crashes. Research has shown there are 5 key groups of focus.

- **Young drivers** — especially males under 25 years old.
- **Shift workers and people with long work hours** — working the night shift can increase your risk of drowsy driving by nearly six times. Rotating-shift workers and people working more than 60 hours a week need to be particularly careful.
- **Commercial drivers** — especially long-haul drivers. At least 15% of all heavy truck crashes involve fatigue and sleep-deprived driving.
- **People with undiagnosed or untreated disorders** — People with untreated obstructive sleep apnea have up to seven times the risk of falling asleep at the wheel.
- **Business travelers** — who spend long hours driving or may be jet-lagged from a previous trip.



The Dangers of Microsleep

You may be unfamiliar with the term, but microsleep is quite common and can be dangerous if it occurs while you are driving a vehicle. Simply put, microsleep is when you fall asleep for a period of several seconds. As the name implies, microsleep occurs so quickly that people who have an episode might not even realize they have fallen asleep. Microsleep can occur at any time of day, not just at night. During an episode, you may appear to be awake, and even have your eyes open, but your brain does not process information.

Why is Microsleep Dangerous?

If you are sleep deprived, or if you have a sleep disorder, you are at higher risk for microsleep. Episodes can happen while you are driving a vehicle or operating other heavy machinery and this is when microsleep becomes precarious. Microsleep can lead to dangerous accidents including collisions or running your car off of the road. If you are driving at a high speed, the likelihood of a severe accident increases. It is important that you make sure that you are alert before you get behind the wheel. **If you feel drowsy, do not drive.** If you find yourself with wandering thoughts, drifting into other lanes, or cannot remember the last few miles you drove, **pull over to the side of the road to rest** (even for just 20 minutes or so) or **ask someone else to drive.**

Preventing Microsleep

The best way to prevent microsleep is prioritizing sleep and making sure you get the right amount of sleep you need to feel refreshed and alert . The National Sleep Foundation recommends 7-9 hours a night for adults, and even more for teenagers.

You can also use the following techniques to better help you fall asleep at night.

- Make sure to turn off electronics one hour prior to bed—no texting!
- Set a relaxing bedtime routine, such as listening to calming music, reading a book, or taking a warm bath.
- Avoid caffeine in the late afternoon and evening.
- If you are able, make sure to sleep in a cool, dark room.

Incorporating Fatigue Management Into Your Workplace

Whether you have a formal fatigue management policy or not, it's important that you address this hazard with all of your employees. Here are some recommended guidelines to consider:

- Conduct periodic fatigue management training for all employees, including information on company policies, how to combat fatigue in the workplace, and signs/symptoms of inadequate sleep.
- Conduct an analysis of work tasks in order to help identify and control fatigue.
- Incorporate fatigue into your workplace incident investigations. When conducting an incident investigation, ask the following questions:
 - How many hours has the person worked in the past 24 hours?
 - How many days has the person worked without a day off?
 - How many days has the person worked in the past two weeks?
 - How long had the person been awake at the time of the incident?
 - Had the person used or otherwise consumed something within the past 24 hours that may increase the risk of fatigue, such as medications, drugs, alcohol, etc.?
 - Has the person been exposed to any hazardous chemicals that may cause fatigue, such as methanol?



- Create and enforce strict travel guidelines for employees who travel out of town for work. Establish a limit for the amount of hours worked in a day when out of town, requiring employees to get a hotel if they meet or exceed that threshold. **Ensure the company pays for this, too! If they're working extra or long hours for the company, the company needs to take care of them and prevent them from driving back while fatigued.**
- Avoid unfamiliar or irregular work shifts, if possible.
- If labor laws require that an employee takes a break, ensure they do so. Working through lunch on rare occasions to finish a certain task is one thing, but regularly skipping lunch and working through it should not be acceptable.

Summary

Even if you don't suffer from a sleep disorder, I think it's a safe bet that most of us would like to ensure we get the proper amount of adequate, quality sleep every night. Working excessive hours for something that can wait until tomorrow can have lifelong consequences if you are involved in a wreck on the way to or from work. This is not an excuse to procrastinate, but rather to ensure you are properly planning out your days, weeks, and even months. Maybe you make it home safely the next time you work late or when taking a long road trip...but what if you don't? Taking a 20-minute nap at the appropriate time can be the difference maker. Let's all take a stand and ensure we take care of our body so that it can take care of us!

For more information about the National Sleep Foundation's Drowsy Driving Prevention Week campaign, visit <https://www.thensf.org/drowsy-driving-prevention>.

Thank you and have a safe week!



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