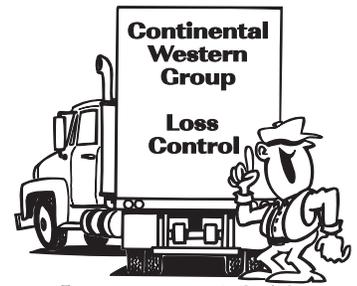


TRUCK TALK

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Sleep Apnea

Obstructive sleep apnea is a condition during sleep in which breathing is interrupted by a physical block to airflow. An individual with sleep apnea is rarely aware of having difficulty breathing, even upon wakening. Snoring is common. A person may have the symptoms of sleep apnea for years, during which time they may become conditioned to the daytime sleepiness and fatigue associated with sleep disturbance.

Recent studies indicate that sleep apnea is a lot more common than the medical community and the motor carrier industry once believed. While there are over 70 different sleep disorders, sleep apnea is by far the most common. One estimate says that a full one-third of the commercial motor vehicles drivers have some form of sleep apnea. In a nutshell, the problem for drivers of commercial motor vehicles is that fatigue is noted as the most common reason for driver inattention. The driver is fatigued because the quality of sleep is not adequate for proper rest for those with sleep apnea.

There is a Medical Review Board that advises the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration on proposed safety rules and regulations. The Medical Review Board has been telling FMCSA since 2008 that sleep apnea is a problem, and that the subject needs to be addressed with additional regulations dealing with the medical qualification of a driver of a commercial motor vehicle. With growing transportation industry interest, and medical community information becoming more readily available, it is possible that some additional regulations regarding sleep apnea could be coming in the not too distant future.

The current regulation that deals with the medical qualification of a driver (391.41) does not give the medical examiner specific instruction regarding sleep apnea. Terms such as "may require further testing" and "additional testing and evaluation should be conducted" are common; they do not require specific action to be taken if a medical provider suspects that sleep apnea may be a medical issue with the driver being examined.

Hence, the problem we have today with the issue of sleep apnea is simple:

- There is no requirement that motor carriers have drivers tested for sleep apnea
- There is no firm guidance from FMCSA to the medical providers regarding testing for sleep apnea

There is increasing evidence that sleep apnea is a problem that needs to be addressed sooner rather than later:

- Drivers with high blood pressure are 2.5 times more likely to be involved in a crash than a driver with normal blood pressure.

- Drivers with sleep apnea are 27 times more likely to be involved in a crash than drivers without sleep apnea.
- Medical providers are realizing the importance of sleep apnea in the transportation industry and are increasingly more likely to require additional testing if they suspect sleep apnea symptoms are present.

Sleep apnea occurs in all age groups and both sexes, but there are certain factors that put you at higher risk:

- A family history of sleep apnea
- Being overweight
- A large neck size (17 inches or greater for men, 16 inches or greater for women)
- Being age 40 or older
- Having a small upper airway
- Having a recessed chin, small jaw, or a large overbite
- Smoking and alcohol use

There will be more information available on this topic as it develops. For now, be aware of the possibility of future FMCSA rule-making, and if you or someone you know is experiencing the signs or symptoms of sleep apnea, please seek medical advice.

The following link at the FMCSA website will provide you with useful information regarding sleep apnea: <http://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/safety-security/sleep-apnea/industry/commercial-drivers.aspx>

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