

TRUCK TALK

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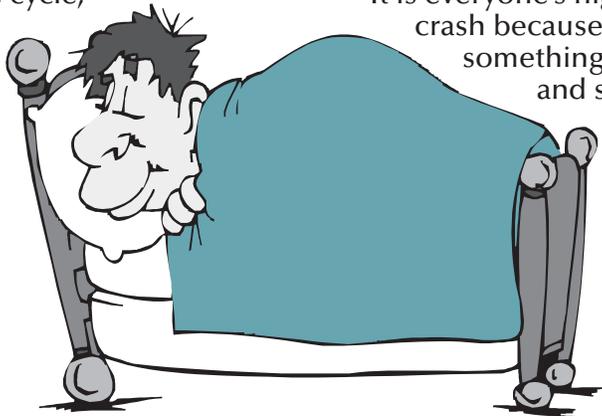
Driving and Sleep

All motor carriers and their drivers know the importance of abiding by rigorous federal hours-of-service regulations, the pressures to meet bottom-line corporate expectations due to a shortage of drivers, and the family sacrifices that drivers make while working long hours. Everyone also knows that driving and being sleep deprived is a dangerous combination.

The effects of fatigue and sleep debt on professional drivers have long been a major issue in the transportation industry. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates that 4 percent of all fatal motor vehicle crashes are caused by drowsy driving. That amounts to at least 1,500 deaths and 71,000 injuries each year, in addition to an estimated \$12.5 billion in lost productivity and property loss. Driver drowsiness was a contributing factor in 20 percent of all crashes and 16 percent of all near crashes, experts say.

The numbers are staggering, yet experts say motor carriers and their drivers still do not seem to understand the need to make sleep a priority in the driver's daily lives. Americans in general are a 24/7 society living in a manner that makes sleep less of a priority. Drivers are working longer and longer hours, and with recent technological advances with Blackberries, cell phone, and e-mail, the lines between home and work are becoming more and more blurred.

Understanding the sleep-wake cycle, which equates to about eight hours of sleep and 16 hours of daytime wakefulness in humans, is controlled by sleep homeostasis and circadian rhythms.



Homeostasis is the process by which the body maintains a steady state of internal conditions such as body temperature and blood pressure. Circadian rhythms, which affect body temperature, hormone levels, and sleep, occur over a 24 hour period and are driven by internal 24-hour rhythms.

The nature of the transportation industry makes for natural barriers to a healthy sleep schedule for drivers. Under normal conditions, it takes about two weeks for the human body to become adjusted to a schedule. Drivers who drive between 3 a.m. and 6 a.m. are at 15 times greater risk for involvement in an accident. Since the vast majority of over-the-road drivers seldom have the same schedule two days in a row, this problem is compounded even more.

One third of truck drivers are said to have a sleep disorder. Because of this, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration plans to update the physical qualification regulations of commercial motor vehicle drivers and is consulting with its medical review board for guidance on establishing medical standards and criteria. 11 states have at some time proposed a drowsy driving bill, and currently Massachusetts is pondering State Senate Bill 2072, which in part makes drowsy driving illegal as well as finding engineering solutions to improving road systems and motor vehicles to make drowsy driving less likely.

It is everyone's nightmare to be involved in a crash because of falling asleep. It is something we worry about every day, and something we need to work on every day to avoid.