

# TRUCK TALK

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## Fatigued Driving

Driver fatigue is a major contributor to the nation's vehicle crashes each year. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration conservatively estimates there are more than 100,000 vehicle accidents each year that are directly contributed to driver fatigue. It is estimated that 20% of all serious transportation injuries on the nation's highways are related to sleep.

The State of Minnesota has implemented a fatigue-testing program for truck drivers. While the national average for driver out-of-service violations in SAFER is 6.8%, Minnesota's out-of-service rate for drivers they suspect of being fatigued is 55%.

The premise behind this activity is that there are too many drivers on the road who are driving while tired. Their log book may be just fine, showing no hours-of-service issues, but that does not negate the fact that they are tired and should not be behind the wheel of a vehicle. In many cases, the driver had the opportunity to rest, but for some reason chose not to take advantage of that opportunity and did something else instead.

Enforcement officials were trained to recognize the signs and symptoms of fatigued driving, much like officials are trained in drug and alcohol recognition. In many cases several officers will converge on a fixed scale site and conduct a screening process looking for fatigued drivers. First, the officer conducts an interview with the driver, looking for signs of sleepiness, fatigue, distraction, irritability, sarcasm, etc. This takes about 45 seconds. The enforcement official makes a decision whether or not to focus further on the driver. If further interviewing is not warranted, the driver is sent on their way.

If the officers have reason to suspect fatigued driving, the driver is asked to park the vehicle and come into the office with log book, license, and paperwork.

Another interview then takes place, by an officer trained in observation and interviewing, who is able to recognize the information that is being made available. Some of the questions officers might ask:

- Where are you going?
- Where did you come from?
- Who loaded your trailer?
- Who secured the cargo?
- Where was your last stop?
- Where are you stopping next?
- What is your planned route?

The officer is also noting the driver's appearance and attitude. Is the driver and vehicle neat and presentable, or are they dirty and appear unkempt? Are the driver's replies to the questions clear and concise, or is the driver irritable and the replies laced with sarcasm and profanity?

During this interview, a Fatigued Driver Evaluation Checklist is completed, and made part of the officer's notes. One or two items noted on a checklist are not conclusive, but several are strong indicators of fatigued driving.

For a copy of the Fatigued Driver Evaluation Checklist, please go to <http://www.mntruck.org/pdf/FatigueChecklist2008.pdf>

Should a driver be placed out-of-service, the officer has the discretion of placing the violation in part 395 (Hours-of-Service) or part 392.3 (Ill or Fatigued Operator). Either way, should a challenge be made via DataQ, the checklist is made available to the challenging party. Note that the bottom of the checklist is completed by the driver.

