Arrive Alive

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration conservatively estimates that 100,000 police-reported crashes are the direct result of driver fatigue each year. This results in an estimated 1,550 deaths, 71,000 injuries, and $12.5 billion in monetary losses. These figures may be the tip of the iceberg, since currently it is difficult to attribute crashes to sleepiness.

- There is no test to determine sleepiness as there is for intoxication, i.e. a "Breathalyzer".
- State reporting practices are inconsistent. There is little or no police training in identifying drowsiness as a crash factor. Every state currently addresses fatigue and/or sleepiness in some way in their crash report forms. However, the codes are inconsistent and two states (Missouri and Wisconsin) do not have specific codes for fatigue and/or fell asleep.
- Self-reporting is unreliable.
- Drowsiness/fatigue may play a role in crashes attributed to other causes such as alcohol. About one million such crashes annually are thought to be produced by driver inattention/lapses.
- According to data from Australia, England, Finland, and other European nations, all of whom have more consistent crash reporting procedures than the U.S., drowsy driving represents 10 to 30 percent of all crashes.

Who is at risk?

Sleep related crashes are most common in young people, especially men, adults with children and shift workers. According to the NSF's 2002 poll:

- Adults between 18-29 are much more likely to drive while drowsy compared to other age groups (71% vs. 30-64, 52% vs. 65+, 19%).
- Men are more likely than women to drive while drowsy (56% vs. 45%) and are almost twice as likely as women to fall asleep while driving (22% vs. 12%).
- Adults with children in the household are more likely to drive drowsy than those without children (59% vs. 45%).
- Shift workers are more likely than those who work a regular daytime schedule to drive to or from work drowsy at least a few days a month (36% vs. 25%).
- Sleep deprivation increases the risk of a sleep-related crash; the less people sleep, the greater the risk.

  According to a study by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, people who sleep

six to seven hours a night are twice as likely to be involved in such a crash as those sleeping 8 hours or more, while people sleeping less than 5 hours increased their risk four to five times.

- A study by researchers in Australia showed that being awake for 18 hours produced an impairment equal to a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of .05, and .10 after 24 hours; .08 is considered legally drunk.
  Other research indicates commercial drivers and people with undiagnosed sleep disorders such as sleep apnea and acute insomnia are also at greater risk for fall asleep crashes.

Nearly three-quarters of adults in America (71%) drive a car to and from work, and many are drowsy drivers, according to NSF's 2001 Sleep in America poll. More than one-fourth of these respondents (27%) said they have driven drowsy to or from work at least a few days a month, 12 percent drove drowsy a few days a week, and four percent said they drove drowsy every day or almost every day.

Sleep deprivation and fatigue make lapses of attention more likely to occur, and may play a role in behavior that can lead to crashes attributed to other causes.

- According to NSF's 2000 Sleep in America poll, when they are driving drowsy, 42 percent of those polled said they become stressed, 32 percent get impatient and 12 percent tend to drive faster.
- In the same poll, about one in five drivers (22%) said they pull over to nap when driving drowsy. Older adults are more likely to pull over and nap than younger drivers, who are most likely to drive when drowsy and least likely to pull over and nap.
- People tend to fall asleep more on high-speed, long, boring, rural highways. However, those who live in urban areas are more likely to doze off while driving compared to people in rural or suburban areas (24% vs. 17%).
- Most crashes or near misses occur between 4:00 – 6:00 a.m.; midnight – 2:00 a.m. and 2:00 – 4:00 p.m. are also peak times for crashes to occur. Nearly one-quarter of adults (23%) say they know someone personally who has crashed due to falling asleep at the wheel.
- In NSF's 1999 Sleep in America poll, 60 percent of parents with children who drive living in the household said they have not discussed the dangers of falling asleep at the wheel. In the 2002 poll, nearly all respondents (96%) agreed that information about driving while drowsy should be included in tests for a driver's license.

Drowsy driving crashes can result in high personal and economic costs.

- Several drowsy driving incidents have resulted in jail sentences for the driver.
- Multi-million dollar settlements have been awarded to families of crash victims as a result of lawsuits filed against individuals as well as businesses whose employees were involved in drowsy driving crashes.