

Goal

This program will provide suggestions and tips for staying alert while driving on the highway.

Objectives

Following this safety training program, drivers will be able to list five ways to stay alert, explain what to do if you become sleepy while driving and discuss how alcohol affects driving.

Overview

Driving a vehicle for long hours is tiring and even the most careful driver can become less alert. Drivers can do several things to help stay alert and safe. Here are few suggestions:

Be Ready to Drive

Leaving on a long trip when you are tired is dangerous. Make sure you get enough sleep before departing on your journey. Most people require 7-8 hours of sleep every 24 hours.

Schedule Trips Safely

Your body becomes accustomed to sleeping during certain hours. If you are driving during those hours, you will be less alert. Try to schedule trips for the hours you are normally awake. Statistics show that the hours between midnight and 6 a.m. are particularly hazardous. Also, don't try to keep going and finish a long trip if you become tired or sleepy.

Avoid Medication

Many medicines can make you sleepy, especially those with a label warning against operating vehicles or machinery. The most common types are over-the-counter cold medications.

Keep Cool

A hot, poorly ventilated car or truck can make you sleepy. Keep a window or vent open or use the air conditioner.

Take Breaks

Short breaks can help you stay alert, but take them before you feel drowsy or tired. Stop often and walk to stretch your muscles. The Texas Department of Transportation recommends taking a break every 100 miles.



Photo courtesy Martin Lucas

Stop to Sleep

Stop when you feel the first signs of sleepiness, even if it is sooner than you planned. By waking a little earlier the next day, you can stay on schedule without endangering yourself or others.

Take a Nap

If you can't stop for the night to sleep, pull off the road at a safe place such as a rest area or truck stop and take a nap. A half-hour nap will do more to overcome fatigue than a half-hour coffee stop.

Avoid Drugs

Drugs do not prevent you from being tired. While they may keep you awake for a while, they won't keep you alert. Eventually you will be more tired than if you hadn't taken them at all. Sleep is the only way to overcome fatigue.

Alcohol and Driving

Drinking and driving is a serious problem. In the United States, alcohol is involved in more than 15,000 traffic deaths every year.

Alcohol goes directly from the stomach into the bloodstream. The amount of alcohol in your body is commonly measured by the blood alcohol concentration (BAC). BAC is determined by the amount you drink, how fast you drink, your weight and your physical and mental health.

Alcohol affects more of the brain as your BAC builds up. The first part of the brain affected controls judgment and self-control. Good judgment and self-control are necessary for safe driving. Your muscle control and coordination become affected as your BAC continues to increase.

Alcohol's effect on vision is less obvious, but traffic accidents are even more likely if vision is distorted—nearly 90 percent of the information processed about traffic is visual. Safe driving relies on visual perception—the process of searching for and identifying danger in traffic. It also

requires correctly predicting what might occur, determining an appropriate course of action and executing the proper response. Studies show that in some situations, a driver must repeat this search/identify/predict/decide/execute process as many as 200 times per mile.

A high BAC will also reduce a person's ability to judge distances and affects peripheral (side) vision. A study by the British Medical Research Council showed the peripheral vision is reduced 30 percent with a BAC of just .055 percent. This could affect driving through intersections or past parked cars where pedestrians may suddenly step out.

Drinking and driving can cause drivers to make serious mistakes, such as:

- Taking longer to react to hazards
- Driving too fast or too slow
- Driving in the wrong lane
- Running over a curb
- Weaving
- Straddling lanes
- Making quick, jerky starts
- Failing to signal
- Failing to use lights or turn signals
- Running stop signs and red lights
- Changing lanes unpredictably



These mistakes can increase the chances of an accident that could lead to a loss of license, arrest, fines, jail time, injuries or death.

Summary

To remain alert and fit to drive safely get enough sleep, schedule driving times, avoid potentially dangerous medications, stay cool, and take frequent breaks. If you do become sleepy while driving, stop to sleep as soon as the first signs of fatigue appear. Either stop for the day or take a nap. Avoid using controlled substances or consuming alcohol. Pay attention to warning labels and to doctor's orders regarding possible adverse side effect that could affect your driving. Don't use any drug that hides fatigue—the only cure for fatigue is rest. Remember, alcohol can increase the effects of other drugs.

The Texas Department of Insurance,
Division of Workers' Compensation (TDI/DWC)
E-mail resourcecenter@tdi.state.tx.us
or call 1-800-687-7080 for more information.

Review

1. What are the most hazardous hours to drive?
 - a. 8:00-12:00 am
 - b. 2:00-6:00 pm
 - c. 8:00-12:00 pm
 - d. 12:00-6:00 am
2. If you do become sleepy while driving, what is something you can do to make your trip safer?
 - a. Stop to sleep.
 - b. Take a nap.
 - c. Avoid drugs.
 - d. All of the above.
3. Which of the following is a way drinking can affect driving?
 - a. It improves your reaction time.
 - b. It improves your vision.
 - c. It can negatively affect your judgment.
 - d. It makes you more fun to be around.
4. You will feel just as refreshed if you stop the vehicle and walk around for 10 minutes as you would by taking a 30-minute nap. T/F
5. Nearly _____ % of the information processed about traffic is visual.
 - a. 10
 - b. 30
 - c. 50
 - d. 90

Answers

1. d
2. d
3. c
4. False (Taking a nap for as short as a half-hour will do more to overcome fatigue than a half-hour coffee stop.)
5. d

Resources

The Texas Department of Insurance, Division of Workers' Compensation (TDI/DWC) Resource Center offers a workers' health and safety video tape library. Call (512) 804-4620 for more information or visit our web site at <http://www.tdi.state.tx.us/wc/safety/employers.html>.

Disclaimer: Information contained in this training program is considered accurate at time of publication.

Safety Violations Hotline
1-800-452-9595
safetyhotline@tdi.state.tx.us