

Fatigue.

Around 40% of sleep-related accidents involve commercial vehicles. Fatigue is a key contributory factor in Hit Third Party in Rear accidents.

Driving is likely to be the most dangerous activity that most company employees will do today. It is estimated that around 150 people are killed or seriously injured every week in crashes while driving for work purposes. Employers have a responsibility through health and safety law to assess the risks involved in their staff's use of the road for work and put in place all 'reasonably practicable' measures to manage those risks.

The consequences of driver fatigue can be disastrous. Mental processing and decision-making are both affected by a lack of sleep and fatigue. Drivers can sometimes lapse into a 'micro-sleep' without even realising, and if this coincides with the requirement to perform a critical driving task in response to a developing hazard, then the risk of crash is greatly increased.

Recognising the early signs of fatigue is vital and will ensure you can mitigate against the risks. You should not try to 'fight' on and ignore it; it won't go away. Drivers should find a safe place to stop and take a short nap (15 minutes) but remember, the only real cure for sleepiness is proper sleep, so caffeine-based drinks and rest breaks will only ever be a short-term (emergency) solution and will never replace the need for proper sleep.

You should take every opportunity to raise your awareness of the key issues around fatigue either at induction training or during ongoing driver training programs and in particular, you should be aware of:

- > The dangers of falling asleep at the wheel
- > The need for safe journey planning

- > The importance of getting sufficient sleep before starting a journey
- > Peak times for accidents are in the early hours (between 2am and 6am) and after lunch
- > The dangers of 'moonlighting' or spending too long on evening hobbies or other social activities which may reduce time available for sleep.

It is the driver's responsibility to manage their driver's hours and ensure sufficient breaks are taken during all journeys. Where appropriate you should:

- > Consider overnight stays when there is a requirement to travel a long distance
- > Consider the effects (e.g. drowsiness or impairment) of prescribed and over-the-counter medicines on your fitness to drive
- > Understand the effects of drinking alcohol the night before and the risk of 'morning after' driving.

It is estimated that up to 95% of crashes are down to driver error. It is therefore vital that you understand the importance of safety and how you can protect yourself and others.

References:

1. think.direct.gov.uk/fatigue.html
2. RoSPA. Driving for Work: Safer Journey Planner, 2011.
3. Dimensions of aberrant driver behaviour, Uppsala University, Sweden, 1998 (cited in Brake: Essential guide to fleet safety, 2014).

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