

MOVE TO DAYLIGHT SAVINGS TIME INCREASES RISK OF DROWSY DRIVING

More than a third of drivers admit to falling asleep at wheel; National Road Safety Foundation offers tips to stay awake on the road

It's an annual rite of spring, although it happens nearly two weeks before spring officially begins. As clocks spring ahead for the start of daylight savings time March 8, roads and highways throughout the nation become a bit more dangerous, according to The National Road Safety Foundation, Inc., a non-profit group that provides free driver safety programs including its newest, called "Recognizing the drowsy driver."

"The change throws off our internal clock, and it can take as long as two weeks for our bodies to adjust," says David Reich, public relations director for The National Road Safety Foundation.

"Drowsiness, a condition most drivers fail to recognize, can be as dangerous as drinking and driving," he adds. "Studies show 60 percent of us have driven while feeling sleepy, and more than a third admit to having fallen asleep at the wheel in the past year. Drowsiness is a factor in a substantial number of traffic crashes."

Experts list several signs that should warn a driver to stop and rest:

- Difficulty focusing, with frequent blinking
- Daydreaming or not remembering the last few miles driven
- Head nodding
- Repeated yawning or rubbing eyes
- Drifting out of your lane, tailgating or hitting rumble strips

A driver who experiences any of these warning signs should pull over at the next exit or a safe rest area and take a break or a 20-minute nap. Have a cup or two of coffee or caffeinated snacks and allow 30 minutes for the caffeine to enter your bloodstream. Don't drink alcohol or take medication.

Sleep-induced crashes are often very serious, since the driver does not take evasive or corrective action as the vehicle loses control.

For more than 40 years, the National Road Safety Foundation has produced films and teaching materials that have been used to train millions of young drivers about the dangers of drinking and driving, speeding and aggressive driving. The Foundation's newest program, "Recognizing the Drowsy Driver," is available free by visiting www.nationalroadsafety.org. You can also download it and other driver safety programs.

* * *