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RISK OF DROWSY DRIVING INCREASES AS WE MOVE AWAY FROM DAYLIGHT SAVINGS TIME

The National Road Safety Foundation offers tips to stay awake at the wheel

NEW YORK, Nov. 2, 2023 -- As we move our clocks back an hour when daylight savings time ends this weekend, the risk of drowsy driving increases as we do more driving in darkness.

“More crashes happen in the dark,” said Michelle Anderson of the National Road Safety Foundation, a non-profit group that produces free driver safety materials used in schools and by parents nationwide.

She cites National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reports that an estimated 100,000 crashes each year are caused by drowsy driving and AAA estimates that 21 percent of fatal crashes involve driver fatigue.

Drowsy driving is more prevalent than many people think. A survey showed more than 60 percent of U.S. motorists have driven while fatigued, and nearly 37 percent admit to having fallen asleep at the wheel, surveys show. At highway speeds, a driver who dozes for only four or five seconds can travel more than the length of a football field, crossing into oncoming traffic or off the road and into a tree.

Drowsy driving is especially common among teens, who tend to keep late hours and think they can function on minimal sleep. Ironically, experts say, teens require more sleep than adults – eight to nine hours each night for teens versus seven to eight for adults.

Safety experts remind drivers to never drink alcohol before driving and to check any medications they take to see if they might induce drowsiness.

The National Road Safety Foundation urges drivers to be alert to these signs of drowsiness while driving:

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

If you experience any of these warning signs, pull over safely and take a break. Have a cup of coffee or a caffeinated snack or take a 20-minute nap. Allow 30 minutes for caffeine to enter your bloodstream. Some common remedies like blasting the radio or opening the car windows are not effective at avoiding drowsiness while driving.

Fatigue can cause 'micro-sleeps' lasting several seconds, which have devastating results when driving. "We've seen too many examples of people trying to make it those last few miles when fatigued, only to crash a block from home," said Anderson. "Don't try to tough it out."

Anderson also encourages passengers to speak up if they are with a driver who seems fatigued. "Don't worry about being considered a back-seat driver," she said. "Speaking up about any risky behavior, whether it's drowsiness or speeding or distraction can save lives."

NRSF has free programs on drowsy driving, including "Almost Home," a compelling 18-minute video, as well as a drowsiness self-assessment quiz and a personal sleep log. All can be downloaded at www.nrsf.org/programs/drowsy-driving

The National Road Safety Foundation, Inc., a non-profit organization founded more than 60 years ago, produces traffic safety programs on distracted driving, speed and aggression, impaired driving, drowsy driving, driver proficiency, pedestrian safety and other traffic safety issues. It distributes its programs free of charge to schools, police and traffic safety advocates, community groups and individuals. It also sponsors contests to engage teens in promoting safe driving to their peers and in their communities, partnering nationally with leading youth advocacy groups SADD and FCCLA.

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