

news & notes

SEAT BELT STUDY

A National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) study shows that daytime seat belt use reached 90.1 percent in 2015, up from 88.5 percent in 2014. Even with higher use, NHTSA notes that nearly half (48 percent) of people killed in crashes in 2015 were not wearing their belts. When used properly, lap/shoulder belts reduce the risk of death to front-seat occupants by 45 percent and the risk of moderate-to-critical injury by 50 percent.

In 2015 seat belts saved nearly 14,000 lives and since 1975, seat belts have saved an estimated 375,000 lives. NHTSA credits state legislators for enacting strong laws, and the nation's police officers for strong enforcement of those laws.

Seat belt use is higher in the West than in other regions of the United States and in states with primary belt use laws. In 34 states, the District of Columbia, American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, drivers can be stopped for failure to use seat belts. In states with secondary laws, drivers can be cited only if they are stopped for another violation.



"Are you sure you're okay to drive? You only slept for eleven weeks this winter."



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Drowsy driving doubles risk

See the link between sleep and safe driving

New research from the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety finds that drivers who miss between 1 and 12 sleep hours, out of the recommended 7 in a 24-hour period, nearly double their risk for a crash. That's especially concerning in view of the fact that, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 35 percent of U.S. drivers get less than 7 hours of sleep per night. Drowsy driving, AAA says, is involved in more than one in five fatal crashes on U.S. roadways each year.

Notes David Yang, Ph.D, executive director of the AAA Foundation, "You cannot miss sleep and still expect to be able to safely function behind the wheel. Our new research shows that a driver who has slept for less than 5 hours has a crash risk comparable to someone driving drunk."

Drivers who missed 2 to 3 hours of sleep more than quadrupled the risk of a crash. The research also found that over a 24-hour period, the crash risk for sleep-deprived drivers increased steadily, compared to that of drivers who slept 7 or more hours.

Drivers seem to know the perils of taking the wheel while sleepy. While 97 percent told the AAA Foundation they view drowsy driving as completely unacceptable and a serious threat to their safety, nearly one in three admit to driving at least once in the past month when they were so tired they had a hard time keeping their eyes open.

Signs of drowsy driving include drifting from lanes and not remembering the last few miles driven. Especially scary is the fact that more than half of drivers involved in fatigue-related crashes experienced no symptoms before falling asleep behind the wheel.

AAA urges drivers not to rely on their body to indicate they're at risk. Instead, make sure to get at least 7 hours of sleep. For longer trips, AAA recommends that drivers:

- Travel at a time when they're normally awake;
- Schedule a break every 2 hours or every 100 miles;
- Travel with an alert passenger and take turns at the wheel;
- Avoid heavy foods; *and*
- Avoid medications that cause drowsiness or other impairment.

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NIGHT SHIFT COMMUTE

About 15 percent of the U.S. workforce are on the job overnight or work rotating shifts. New research finds that those who commute home after working the night shift may be at high risk for drowsy-driving crashes because of disruption to their sleep/wake cycles and insufficient sleep during the night.

Brigham and Women's Hospital and the Liberty Mutual Research Institute evaluated the daytime driving performance of night-shift workers after a night of shift work compared to driving after a night of sleep. They found that 37.5 percent of drivers participating in a test drive were involved in a near-crash event. The same drivers, with normal sleep the night before the test, had zero near-crashes.

Comparing the performance of the drivers after they slept and after the night shift researchers found that sleep-related impairment was evident within the first 5 minutes of driving. Almost one-half of the drives were terminated early because the participants failed to maintain control of their vehicle. The researchers found that even veteran night-shift workers were vulnerable to the risks.



Stay on your feet—Inside and out

Take precautions to prevent slips and falls

Slips and falls become a serious hazard in winter because weather conditions often make for wet or icy surfaces outdoors. Even wet leaves or mud can create treacherous walking conditions. And that wetness can easily be tracked indoors. Here's how to create slip-free zones inside and out.

Inside

- Clean up or report wet spots immediately.
- Heed warnings on signs or barriers around wet, slippery, or otherwise hazardous floors.
- Wipe your shoes on entryway mats when you come in from outside.

Outside

- Wear sensible shoes with nonskid soles on bad weather days.
- Walk slowly, take small steps, and slide your feet on wet or slippery surfaces.

Inside and outside

- Fix or report hazardous conditions anywhere inside or outside your facility.
- Know how, and to whom, to report any slipping hazards you can't clean up effectively inside.
- Know how, and to whom, to report any slipping hazards you notice outside on walkways, in parking lots, or elsewhere on your property.

Cold weather counsel

Protect yourself from chilly conditions

Cold temperatures are still the order of the day in many parts of the country. The old saying "as the days begin to lengthen the cold begins to strengthen" may indeed be happening in many areas, so keep up with your cold weather safety precautions—no matter what the groundhog saw on February 2!

Remember that prolonged exposure to cold or freezing temperatures can cause serious health problems, including frostbite and hypothermia. Danger signs include uncontrolled shivering, slurred speech, fatigue, and confused behavior. Don't hesitate to call for help if you observe these signs in yourself or coworkers.

Here are several more steps you can take to protect yourself from the cold:

- Wear proper clothing for cold, wet, and windy conditions, especially layers that can be adjusted as conditions change.
- Wear a hat to reduce the amount of body heat that escapes from your head.
- In extreme conditions take frequent short breaks in warm, dry shelters.
- Perform outdoor work in the warmest part of the day.
- Use the buddy system—work in pairs so that one worker can recognize danger signs in a coworker.
- Drink warm, sweet beverages and avoid drinks with caffeine.
- Know that risks can increase with certain medications, if you are in poor physical condition, or suffer from illnesses like diabetes, hypertension, or cardiovascular disease.