

DRIVER SAFETY LETTER



Drowsy Driving

January 2023

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates drowsy driving causes at least 100,000 police-reported crashes and kills more than 1,550 Americans yearly. Interestingly, all states have laws to enforce drunken driving, but few have laws to cite a driver who has fallen asleep and cause an accident. Only New Jersey defines drowsy driving as recklessness under a vehicular homicide statute. Known as "Maggie's Law," New Jersey's drowsy driving law has raised awareness of the consequences of fatigue behind the wheel and has spurred significant action in other states. There are now at least eight states with 12 pending bills that address fatigued driving in various ways.

Just like drunk, drugged and distracted driving, drowsy driving is a real public health issue. When you drive without adequate sleep, your motor skills are seriously impaired. In fact, drivers who've only slept 3 to 5 hours in the last 24 hours are unfit to drive. Most people understand it's risky, but they don't think about the consequences.

So what can you do to ensure you are better rested when you report for duty? According to the National Sleep Foundation:

- Eat your meals at consistent times.
- Exercise regularly for a deeper sleep. Aim for 30 minutes a day, 5 days a week.
- Spend time in bright light during the day, natural light or equivalent brightness.
- Avoid heavy meals, nicotine, caffeine, and alcohol before bedtime.
- Use a consistent routine with a relaxing wind-down to help get the sleep you need each night (7–9 hours for most adults, with consistent sleep and wake times.)
- Put your electronic devices away an hour before bed and sleep in a quiet, cool, and dark environment

What You Can Do to Stay Alert While Driving

- **Take naps:** Your best bet is to get enough sleep daily. If you must stay up late, afternoon naps are a great way to get more sleep. A 15-minute nap can be very effective if you feel drowsy while driving. Make sure to pull over in a safe place.
- **Caffeine:** Avoid caffeine during the last half of your workday, as it may contribute to sleeping problems. You can gain short-term alertness by drinking coffee or other caffeine sources if driving, but it usually takes 30 minutes to take effect and wears off after a few hours.
- **Regular stops:** You should stop every 100 miles or 2 hours. Switch drivers if you can.
- **AC MAX – Recirculation:** Do not operate the vehicle for extended periods with the AC on MAX or Recirculation. Under these conditions, the level of CO₂ in the vehicle increases, contributing to drowsy driving.
- **Tricks that do not work:** Opening the window, turning on the air conditioning, or playing loud music is ineffective in keeping drivers alert for extended periods.

The NPTC Monthly Driver Safety Letter, jointly sponsored by NPTC and [Centerline Drivers](#), is a Microsoft Word document that you can print out and post as is, if appropriate, or modify any way you wish to make it a better fit for your drivers, including adding your company logo. If you are already doing an in-house letter, you may find information here that you can cut and paste into your own letter. If you are interested in specific subjects, or have any comments/feedback, contact Tom Moore, CTP, at tmoores@nptc.org or (703)838-8898.