

Safe Driving for Shiftworkers

Have you ever seen the black dog? In truck driving lore, the black dog supposedly comes when a truck driver has been driving too long and starts to fall asleep at the wheel. The dog's appearance is a precursor to an accident. A pipeline safety inspector from the state of Louisiana told me last week that the late Patrick Swayze was in a movie about truckers titled *Black Dog*. Shiftworkers and truckers share some work similarities: long hours, working at night, using mostly their vision to guide their actions. All of these cause fatigue and can contribute to accidents.

I remember “zoning out” on drives home after working at night or working long periods on a construction job, trying to stay awake but occasionally nodding off into a microsleep. What about you? More than 28% of drivers admitted to driving when they had a hard time keeping their eyes open (AAA 2013 Traffic Safety Culture Index). In the same poll, 95% said that driving while extremely drowsy was unacceptable. Humans are crazy; we take risks that lead to our own harm and the harm of others. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration conservatively estimates that 100,000 police-reported crashes are the direct result of driver fatigue each year. This results in an estimated 1,550 deaths, 71,000 injuries, and \$12.5 billion in monetary losses. (drowsydriving.org)

If you are drowsy, pull over and find a safe place to rest. Schedule a break from driving every hour or two. Don't work all day and drive all night. Don't work all night, finish a set of shifts, and then drive all day either. People whose career requires working rotating 12 hour shifts should consider living close to their work locations in order to reduce their commute times and to allow more time for sleep between shifts.

One of our sons loved Halloween. He would say, “The goblins come out on Halloween night!” The goblins, the ghosts, the aliens, the black dog, and other spirits can come out at any time when sleep deprivation leads to hallucinations. Be careful on Halloween and practice safe driving habits every day. Those habits should include being well rested before driving and avoiding drowsy driving.

Football and Sleep

Are you ready for some football news related to sleep? Two Wall St. Journal articles this summer were about the steps football coaches are taking to ensure that players get their rest.

- University of Tennessee assigned “sleep coaches” to monitor sleep habits. The players have beds with sensors that measure heart rates, respiration and movement to determine how long it takes players to fall asleep. The players are also provided orange-tinted glasses to block certain wavelengths of light and make it easier to fall asleep.
- University of Houston provided specially designed air mattresses and set aside time during the daily fall practice for afternoon naps.
- University of Pittsburgh coach Ray Nardozi stayed in the dorm during preseason camp and tucked the players in each night at lights out.
- One of the coaches checks the times that players are posting to Twitter, Instagram, and/or Facebook to see if all lights were really out.
- A 2010 study of Stanford football players found that players getting 10 hours of sleep had improved speeds in 40-yard dashes and 20-yard shuttles, along with improved energy levels and mood.

This news can apply to us: Learn from sleep science, monitor our sleep habits, have a good sleep environment, take a nap, stop looking at devices late at night, sleep 10 hours, and have our manager tuck us in after work.

