

# SafeDriver Monthly Newsletter

May 2023



## Driving Drowsy

Almost everyone has had nights where they have either had difficulty sleeping or simply didn't sleep for long enough. While this is sometimes bragged about as an example of how hard someone is working or how little time they have, a lack of sleep can have disastrous consequences when placed within the driver's seat of a vehicle. Some of the symptoms of driving drowsy closely resemble those of driving drunk, and the consequences for driving drowsy can be severe for yourself or those who drive near you.



Driving while drowsy can happen to anyone, but driving with this hazard is far more prevalent for young adult drivers. The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety found within their survey that drivers aged 16-24 were almost twice as likely to be involved in a crash than participants aged 40-59 due to drowsy driving. Younger drivers have a variety of responsibilities that can vary between attending school, working a job, participating in sports, and caring for younger siblings. Between attending to these responsibilities and trying to find personal time, maintaining a steady sleep schedule can be more difficult for them than their adult counterparts. Staying aware of the amount of sleep they receive and level of drowsiness they feel can help prevent a crash.

Symptoms of drowsiness can include frequent yawning, difficulty keeping eyes open, drifting on the road, forgetting what you recently passed or missing your turn, and roving thoughts with little connection to each other. Maintaining attention to how your body displays drowsiness can help prevent you from becoming a part of the 16.5% of fatal crashes which included a drowsy driver as estimated by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety.

Levels of drowsiness can be deceiving; the AAA Foundation uncovered this when 75% of drivers who participated in their research who reported low levels of drowsiness were found to have moderate-high levels. Similarly to those who did not accurately identify levels of intoxication before sitting behind the wheel, people young and old can underestimate the effect that their sleep, or lack thereof, can have within their body.

A simple way to avoid causing or experiencing injuries or death in a crash due to drowsiness is to take breaks, nap, pay attention to your body, and consume caffeine. While caffeine can help eliminate some of the effects of drowsiness, its effect is temporary and does not fix the underlying lack of sleep that causes it. Recognizing when this occurs or pausing every 100 miles to evaluate how your feeling, especially when driving at night, will provide more opportunities to rest or nap as needed.

Gaspar, J. & Carney, C. (2023). Drowsiness and Decision Making During Long Drives: A Driving Simulation Study (Technical Report). Washington, D.C.: AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety.

Tefft, B.C. (2010). The Prevalence and Impact of Drowsy Driving (Technical Report). Washington, D.C.: AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety.

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# Weather

Weather can have an unintended and devastating effect on drivers and their passengers. While some weather occurs without warning, becoming aware of potential driving conditions before driving can help prepare and prevent people from crashing.

Weather patterns and hazards vary across the world, but some of the common driving hazards created by weather include hydroplaning, rushing/still water, black ice, and severe wind. As these are only examples of common weather hazards that may be encountered while driving, it is important to become informed about local hazards that may occur where you will be traveling.

Major weather events will most typically be broadcasted online, in the news, and over the radio. If you are in an effected area and signed up for emergency alerts on your cell phone, these alerts should come through as the announcements are made. While this can prevent some personal injury or damage to a vehicle, weather can change abruptly without warning and knowing how to drive when encountering it is critical to personal safety and safety for other drivers on the road.

Hydroplaning can occur when a car's tire goes through more water than it can effectively scatter. The front of the tire pushes water underneath the wheel, and the water creates a



thin film that separates the tire from the road. Once this occurs, the driver will experience a lack of response on the wheel and the brakes will not work until the car ceases sliding. Hydroplaning can occur when there is any water on the road, but it is the most dangerous directly after it begins to rain as the water mixes with the oil left behind on the road by cars and creates a slick surface. To regain control of the car, release the gas and pump the pedal gently until you feel the car stop skidding. Hitting the brake hard will worsen the sliding.

It only takes 12 inches of water for a vehicle to be swept away if water is spilling over the road or through a bridge. The best way to avoid being picked up and seriously injured or killed is to never drive through moving water. This remains true for still water as well. When water has collected onto roadways after heavy rainfall or flooding, without a way to know the true depth of what you may drive into you should not go through. The water could flood your engine or go into your car.

Black ice occurs when water freezes onto the road in cold weather. As it is a thin sheet of ice, the black color of the tarmac can be seen through it. When sliding on black ice it is important to stay calm and avoid jerking the wheel or stomping the brakes. If



you need to slow down, press on the brake very gently, and gently turn the wheel into the turn if your car begins to go sideways.

Driving in severe wind can be dangerous for all vehicles, but taller vehicles can be more greatly affected. When driving in high wind it is important to keep both hands steady on the wheel and pay attention to the vehicles around you. Have extra caution around vehicles carrying cargo and, where possible, give larger vehicles extra room.

Driving within amplified or extreme weather conditions can be scary, but remaining calm and slowly working to regain control of your vehicle can help prevent a costly crash.

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## ICE: In Case of Emergency

Most modern phones now have a specific section underneath the contacts list where people are able to fill in an emergency contact and medical information. This is done in case of an accident in which they are unable to relay their personal information to medical personnel. While most cars don't have this same type of in-built feature, many of them can be outfitted with items or connected services that offer the same assistance.

In the case of an emergency, some cars made after 2010 and most cars made after 2018 have a built in SOS button. In the United States this is a service that must be paid for by a monthly subscription. This will contact emergency services when pressed and send them your location.

There are over 14,000 car accidents that happen daily. Though some of these accidents may be simple fender-benders, others are deadly. For people with medical conditions that require consistent care or allergies, there are medical alert seat belts. The condition or allergy is printed onto a simple strap that wraps around the seatbelt and is easily removed. Those with conditions or allergies that medical personnel would need to be immediately alerted to should take this strap with them when they move seats or cars.



Another potentially life saving item is the window breaker for cars. It is very small, a little smaller than an average human fist, and has a metal point on one part of it. Thousands of cars are submerged in water each year and hundreds of people die by drowning in them. The window breaker can be used to break the window on your car or another's if you are unable to exit the vehicle through the door. When submerged, car doors are incredibly

difficult to pry open until the pressure within the car matches the pressure of the water around the car. By this point, most occupants would have drowned without being able to exit the vehicle.

Thousands of people report vehicle fires each year. Regardless of whether the fire was caused by the car itself or as a result of an accident, keeping a small fire extinguisher within your vehicle could potentially save a life or thousands of dollars in damage. Small fire extinguishers can be found at most department and automotive stores.

Although there is no guarantee that someone will personally need these items, having possession of them within their vehicle so they're available when needed is far preferable to being hurt or worse without them. It's important for new drivers to be aware of what these items are and how to use them should they ever find themselves or another in a situation requiring them.



There is risk every time someone is transported from one place to another regardless of the mode used. By having some of these cheap items available within their cars, drivers will have a better chance of saving themselves or their vehicle should an accident occur.

