



Safety Topic

Fatigue While Driving

What Is Fatigue?

Fatigue is defined by Webster's Dictionary as "weariness or exhaustion from labor, exertion, or stress." It's important to realize that fatigue is a *symptom* of one or more of several different causes. It can have very dangerous consequences if we do not recognize the symptoms and take time to address the causes, especially in the T&D Industry where we have to worry about fatigue both when we're working and driving.

When crews answer the call for urgent work, we're working long hours and face a lot of stressors throughout the days and weeks. It doesn't take more than a few long days for the effects of these stressors to cause fatigue.

What Are the Causes of Fatigue?

Fatigue can be caused by working long hours, not getting enough sleep, or taking on too much physical OR mental stress. On top of that, medications, alcohol usage, and diet can play roles in causing fatigue. A person suffering from chronic fatigue may also find that it is a result of an illness they may *or may not* know about. Sleep apnea is one of these more common illnesses.

Fatigue While Driving – "Drowsy Driving"

Often referred to as drowsy driving, driving while you are tired or fatigued is extremely dangerous. Beyond the obvious hazard of falling asleep, your reaction time and awareness of hazards become impaired. After being awake for more than 20 hours, your brain has the equivalent impairment as that of someone with a 0.08% blood alcohol level, which is the legal limit to drive in most states. For those of us with Commercial Driver Licenses, it's well above our limit. It is estimated that approximately 700 fatalities are caused each year by drowsy driving. Exact statistics are unknown, but it is estimated that in the year 2022, 693 fatalities were caused by drowsy driving.

Signs of Drowsy Driving

Yawning, nodding off, "forgetting" the last few miles you drove, missing key road turns or signs, inadvertent slowing speed, and drifting out of lane.

What Can We Do?

-  **1. Talk**
Talk with your passenger so you can stay awake and focused.
-  **2. Switch Places**
Switch places with the passenger or find another driver.
-  **3. Drink Coffee**
Drinking coffee or energy drinks **MAY** help, but is often not enough.
-  **4. Sing**
Sing songs that you know.
-  **5. Pull Over**
Pull over and get some fresh air or quick exercise, such as push-ups.
Pull over in a safe, well-lit location, such as a rest stop, and get a 20-30 minute nap.
-  **6. Take a Nap**
Some people recommend an activity that does not distract from driving, like eating small snacks.
-  **8. Get Adequate Sleep**
Get adequate sleep daily – 7 to 9 hours.
-  **9. Avoid Some Medications**
Avoid medications that may cause drowsiness prior to driving.
-  **10. Watch for Fatigued Drivers**
KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR OTHER DRIVERS WHO MAY BE FATIGUED. Use defensive driving techniques to avoid negative interactions with them, such as maintaining a safe following distance and leaving yourself a place to get out of the way if they veered into your lane.