Top 10 Ways to Prevent Truck Driver Fatigue

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One of the most pressing problems in the trucking industry today is fatigued driving. In research conducted by The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), 52 percent of 107 single-vehicle accidents involving heavy trucks were fatigue-related; in nearly 18 percent of cases, the driver admitted to falling asleep. According to a 2014 presentation by the FMCSA using data from the CDC and NIOSH, 34% of long-haul truckers have fallen asleep at the wheel.

Driver fatigue is often caused by the hypnotic effect of driving, especially during nighttime hours. Peak levels for drowsiness at night can be 10 times higher than daytime levels; early hours of the morning and the middle of the afternoon have been shown to be peak times for fatigue accidents. Long trips on monotonous roads, such as highways, contribute significantly to the issue of fatigued driving. Recent research also shows that sensations of sleepiness that many experience right after waking up from sleep can be a dangerous time.

Tiredness and fatigue can affect your ability to focus long before you are aware you’re getting tired. Fatigue-related crashes are often more severe because there is a lag time in the driver’s reaction and ability to maneuver to avoid or mitigate a crash. Symptoms of driver fatigue include:

- heavy eyelids
- frequent yawning
- letting the vehicle drift and wander across road lines
- varying vehicle speed for no apparent reason
- misjudging traffic situations
- mild hallucinations (such as thinking you see something “jump out at you” from the road
- feeling fidgety
- irritability

Too often, trucking fleets force their drivers to violate the hours of service rules, and drive longer than the law permits. Profit-driven motives play a significant factor in the pressure drivers feel from their company. As a result, thousands of Americans are killed on our highways every year. According to the DOT, roughly 130,000 individuals are injured in truck accidents each year, and 1 in 8 traffic fatalities involve a collision with a truck.

Here are the top 10 ways to prevent driver fatigue:

1. Stop when you feel tired. Don’t try to make it to your destination. Get out, take a break and walk around to wake yourself up.
2. Plan breaks ahead of time at 2 hour intervals.
3. Plan your sleep time ahead of time.
4. Don’t eat a heavy meal and then try to drive a long distance. It is better to eat smaller amounts more frequently to avoid sleepiness.
5. Avoid excessive amounts of caffeine, drink lots of water and eat fruit and healthy snacks instead of high fatty, sugary foods.
6. Use air conditioning to keep you more alert if needed.
7. If you are taking medication, make sure it doesn’t cause drowsiness. If it does, discuss your concerns with your doctor.
8. Adjust your seat to an upright position to ensure the base of your wrists make contact with the top of the steering wheel, increasing your ability to stay alert while at the wheel.
10. Take a power nap of 20 minutes to boost energy levels as well as improve your driving skills and alertness.