

Traffic Safety News and Facts for Employers March 3, 2008

Current Traffic Safety News

'Highway Hypnosis' Can Cause Crashes

Lack of sleep is a factor in one-fifth of vehicle crashes and near-crashes and is to blame in one-third of fatal truck crashes. About 60 percent of Americans admit to having driven while drowsy, and 37 percent said they nodded off at the wheel. But even if drivers don't fall asleep, they can go for miles in a state of "highway hypnosis," when reflexes are slow and judgment impaired. Getting four hours of sleep for five nights is the equivalent to staying awake for 24 hours, which is like being legally drunk. "Our society thinks sleep is for slackers," the acting CEO of the National Sleep Foundation said. Teens and young adults cause at least half of drowsy-driving crashes—they're the group that needs the most sleep, but they get the least. Drowsy-driving laws are pending in several states, but New Jersey is the only state with one on the books. The best way to prevent a drowsy-driving crash is to plan ahead and get enough sleep the night before a drive or to pull over if yawning, blinking frequently or drifting from the lane. Source: National Sleep Foundation, February 19, 2008 from the Daily Herald, February 11, 2008

Sleep Apnea Suffers Have More Crashes

People with obstructive sleep apnea (OSA) are significantly more likely to be in a crash than people without the disorder. University of British Columbia researchers studied crash records and polysomnographic findings of OSA sufferers and those without OSA. The people with OSA were twice as likely to have a crash, and those crashes were more likely to be severe and involve injury. The study was the first to research severity of crashes involved. Based on the findings, people suspected of having OSA should be screened for the disorder and made aware of the potential driving hazards. Source: National Sleep Foundation, February 19, 2008

Advocates Grade States on Highway Safety Laws

Most states were given average grades in an annual report by the Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety (AHAS). The annual study grades each state on the enactment of 15 new laws to reduce the number of traffic fatalities; none of the states have adopted all 15. Combined, the states enacted 25 new laws in 2007. "We can and must do better, starting with the strong foundation of proven effective laws," AHAS President Judith Lee said. For more information, go to http://www.upi.com/NewsTrack/Top_News/2008/02/18/states_graded_on_highway_safety/1150/ or <http://www.saferoads.org/2008RoadmapPressRelease.pdf>. Source: United Press International, February 18, 2008

Systems Help Drivers See People, Animals at Night

Night-vision systems are set to become more mainstream in the auto industry. Suppliers are offering military-style systems that help drivers spot people, animals and other obstructions by using infrared cameras and sensors. Night vision helps drivers see pedestrians in urban settings or deer on rural roads and uses audible and visual warnings to alert the driver. BMW offers night vision in some of its cars and wants to make it more widely available. General Motors is considering the technology again because of its potential to make driving safer. Supplier Autoliv expects more car companies to offer the systems within a year. The downside is that displays can be distracting and divert attention from the road. It's a costly option, but newer systems should be less than \$1,000. For more information, go to <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB120355062952781227.html> Source: Wall Street Journal, February 21, 2008



Electronic Stability Control is the New Seat Belt

Electronic stability control might become just as important as a seat belt when it comes to protecting motorists. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) estimates universal adoption of the technology by 2011 will save 10,000 lives a year. ESC is one of many new advancements designed to prevent crashes instead of just protect occupants. "I believe the most promising gains in highway safety are going to come from the deployment of crash-avoidance technologies," NHTSA Administrator Nicole Nason told a Congressional committee. Instead of choosing individual safety options, buyers most likely will pick full packages. Source: MSNBC, February 20, 2008

Plan Can Help Employees Cope after Workplace Fatality

Companies should have a plan in place to help grieving workers after an on-the-job fatality, suggests Danny Cain, a safety/risk manager and former clinical social worker. To help de-escalate the situation, provide support, assess emotional effects and offer follow-up support, companies should conduct a debriefing managed by an outside professional. Cain also suggests developing protocol, such as who the spokesperson will be if a fatality occurs. "I think preparedness before an event happens is always the best plan," he said. The death of a coworker affects all employees, so all employees should be offered the debriefing. The incident's aftermath can affect workers' performance and hinder safety. Cain developed a six-phase plan to help employees work through the death of a coworker. The pocket guide is available at www.OccupationalHazards.com
Source: Occupational Hazards e-newsletter, February 13, 2008

Options Turn Ford Trucks into Mobile Offices

Ford is equipping some new trucks and vans with products that will allow users to check inventories, print invoices, retrieve documents and check fuel prices while on the road. Ford Work Solutions is being demonstrated at the Greater Cleveland Auto Show through March 4. An in-dash computer with 6.5-inch touch screen, keyboard, mouse and high-speed Internet access allow documents to be opened, updated and printed. Navigation, fuel pricing and hands-free phone service also are available. Other options include Tool Link, which lets owners mark tools and equipment with radio frequency ID tags; Crew Chief, an Internet application that lets fleet owners track and dispatch vehicles; and Cable Lock, a steel cable that can be wound through items to lock them to the truck. Customers who purchase a 2009 truck can install the options on vehicles back to the 1997 model year.
Source: WorkTruck Online, February 20, 2008

Truck Stops Participate in Campaign to Improve Safety, Cleanliness

The national trade group that represents truck stops and travel plazas is launching a new public education program to help truck stops address drivers' concerns. NATSO created the "Travel Safely Network" after finding that drivers are most concerned with cleanliness and safety of truck stops and rest areas. Those that join the network must follow specific guidelines in five key areas: cleanliness, lighting, security, community engagement and education. The network will provide educational materials to travel plazas and rest stops. For more information go to <http://www.ttnews.com/articles/basetemplate.aspx?storyid=19185>
Source: Transport Topics, February 11, 2008

West Virginia Drivers Could Face Harsher Penalties for High BACs

West Virginia's Senate Judiciary Community approved a bill that would require ignition interlock devices for first-time offenders who have a blood-alcohol content of .15 or higher. Drivers with high BAC levels also would spend 24 hours in jail and face incarceration up to six months. The legislation would eliminate mandatory jail time for offenders with a BAC between .08 and .15 percent. A similar approach in New Mexico led to a 12 percent decrease in drunk-driving deaths and a 26 percent decline in drunk-driving crashes. Source: JoinTogether, February 14, 2008



Perishable Nature of Produce Keeps Truckers on Edge

Some produce truckers feel more pressure to get the job done because of the time-sensitive nature of their cargo. "It can be stressful," one truck driver said. "You just know you got to get it there." He would speed a few miles over the limit to get loads to their destinations on time, and he worried about damage to the produce because he had to pay out of pocket for any bruises. Produce trucks seem to keep crashing near Barstow, Calif., and one reason could be that a 2005 highway safety bill contained exemptions for companies in the agriculture industry. The Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance will try to close those exemptions when the bill is up for reauthorization in 2009. The California Trucking Association says the exemptions are necessary so drivers don't face the pressure of time restrictions, and that trucks crash in Barstow because there are several popular truck routes in the area. For more information, go to

<http://www.desertdispatch.com/onset?db=desertdispatch&id=2635&template=article.html>

Source: Desert Dispatch, February 21, 2008

Cities Attempt to Improve Crosswalk Safety

Several cities are trying new approaches to reduce pedestrian deaths and injuries. The Federal Highway Administration next year will recommend that states increase by almost 15 percent the amount of time pedestrians have to cross the street after the flashing orange hand appears. In Portland, Ore., police conduct crosswalk crackdowns, in which decoys cross the street and cars are pulled over if they don't stop. Phoenix is replacing 1,000 traffic signals with countdown timers, and several other cities stop all traffic in an intersection for 30 seconds so pedestrians can cross in any direction. An innovative system in Tucson called HAWK (High-intensity Activated crossWalk) is used at crosswalks with no traffic light. Pedestrians press a button when they want to cross, and yellow and red lights warn drivers to come to a stop. For more information, go to

http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2008-02-24-crosswalk_N.htm?loc=interstitialskip

Source: USA Today, February 24, 2008

Week Highlights Importance of Sleep

National Sleep Awareness Week starts March 3 to coincide with the return of Daylight Saving Time, when Americans lose an hour of sleep by turning their clocks ahead an hour. Sleep care centers, healthcare facilities and other organizations are planning local and statewide events, activities and promotions to raise awareness of sleep and sleep disorders. The National Sleep Foundation will release its 2008 Sleep in America poll results. The poll focuses on how sleep affects work and daytime performance and how the demands of working long hours interfere with sleep and safety. For more information on how you as an employer can educate your workforce on the Importance of sleep link to www.sleepfoundation.org

Mobile Communications Tools Connect Trucks to Managers

Connecting dispatchers, managers and drivers is becoming more and more common in heavy-duty truck fleets. Some companies use cellular-based mobile communications systems to stay in touch with their drivers and trucks. "With skyrocketing transportation costs, it's absolutely imperative that that we know what's happening in the trucks," one senior director of operations said. His company uses a system where drivers send text messages via an onboard computer only when the truck is parked. The next step is making the system portable. Hardware costs and monthly fees are dropping, which will help make the services more mainstream. For more information, go to

<http://www.lmtruck.com/articles/petemplate.aspx?storyid=63> Source: Light & Medium Truck, February 8, 2008

News from USDOT

USDOT Secretary Peters Announces New Strategy to Improve Safety on Rural Roads



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U.S. Transportation Secretary Mary E. Peters announced this week a new national strategy that will bring new focus, including resources and new technology, to reducing deaths on the nation's rural roads. "We want to put the brakes on rural road fatalities," said Secretary Peters. "This is a challenge that we have the experience, the ability and the resources to address. We can make our rural roads safer, we can do it now and we can do it without reinventing the wheel." The Department's Rural Safety Initiative will help states and communities develop ways to eliminate the risks drivers face on America's rural roads and highlight available solutions and resources. The new endeavor addresses five key goals: safer drivers, better roads, smarter roads, better-trained emergency responders, and improved outreach and partnerships. The Secretary said approximately \$287 million in existing and new funding is available to support the effort. For more information, visit www.dot.gov/affairs/ruralsafety/

International Traffic Safety News

Steering Wheel Would Detect Signs of Fatigue

Swedish and Israeli researchers are working on a steering wheel sensor that would be able to tell whether a driver is becoming fatigued or drowsy. Instead of focusing on signs of fatigue in the eyes, the new Euro 1.76 million project would analyze steering wheel handling.

Source: CompanyCar Driver, February 15, 2008

British Employees Log Many Miles in 2007

British workers drove 7.3 billion miles on business last year, an average of 1,936 miles per expense-claiming employee. They also took 2.5 trips by train and 0.5 by plane in 2007. Workers in the media and publishing industry logged the most miles and taxi trips. The average cost of train fare is rising, while the price for plane tickets is dropping. Source: FleetNews, February 15, 2008

Agency Polls Drivers about Distractions

The U.K. Highways Agency conducted a survey to gather the views, experiences and perceptions of drivers about distraction. The survey is part of a study that researches potential sources of driver distraction that occur outside the vehicle, such as crashes and advertisements.

Source: FleetNews, February 15, 2008

EU Researchers to Explore Affects of Different Drinks, Drugs on Driving

Researchers from 18 EU countries and Norway will test and survey thousands of drivers to examine how different alcoholic beverages and drugs affect driving performance. The project aims to provide interested parties, such as fleet managers, with information to help them manage the problem of drunk and drugged driving. The Driving under the Influence of Drugs, Alcohol and Medicine (DRUID) project will check samples from volunteers for 33 substances. The University of Ghent in Belgium is coordinating the project and will check 4,000 drivers alone, some after crashes and others in general spot checks. Source: CompanyCar Driver, February 15, 2008

Removing Traffic Signals, Signs Could Save Lives

According to a report by Britain's County Surveyors' Society, redesigning roads so drivers and pedestrians are unsure who has priority will save lives. Barriers and signs such as railings, curbs and traffic lights cause crashes because people assume these devices will keep them safe, and therefore fail to recognize what others around them are doing. Removing signs encourages drivers to slow down to negotiate a safer course. The report, called Travel is Good, recommends wider adoption of "shared space," a concept pioneered in the Netherlands and known in Britain as "naked streets." In one Dutch town, removing traffic lights at a major intersection resulted in a dramatic drop in crashes. For more information, go to <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/environment/article3359881.ece>

Source: The Times, February 13, 2008

Training for Young Drivers Could Offset Rising Crash Rates

Crash rates for young drivers seem to be getting worse—one major insurer confirms that claims by drivers under age 23 have increased by more than 300 percent over the last five years. “It’s imperative for young drivers to complete an in-vehicle risk assessment in order to determine their competence to drive safely in a variety of traffic situations, prior to being authorized to drive any vehicle for the first time,” Norwich Union’s motor risk manager said. Fleet managers must be careful about a blanket ban that would prevent young employees from driving company vehicles, because it could be discriminatory. Young fleet drivers should have appropriate vehicle-specific knowledge and training.

Source: FleetNews, February 14, 2008

Environmentally Friendly Driving Saves Green at Pump

Drivers can save some green if they decide to drive green, while motorists who don’t adopt “eco-driving” contribute to £2.2 billion wasted fuel bill each year. To improve fuel efficiency and drive down costs, drivers should keep tires inflated at the proper pressure, stay within the speed limit, remove unnecessary clutter, reduce stop and starts, limit idling and plan the route in advance to avoid getting lost. Source: FleetNews, February 26, 2008

Black Boxes Help Company Monitor Drivers, Reward Safe Practices

To reduce driver risk and improve safety, T-Mobile set out to identify risky drivers and promote change in their performance. T-mobile fitted its drivers’ vehicles with black boxes that record every movement. The data is then loaded to the driver’s personal profile and can be viewed online or by text message. Drivers are given green, yellow or red safety marks for each trip, and they can track their progress over time. Driver profiles are anonymous, so they cannot be reprimanded for unsafe driving. Drivers are divided into groups and receive rewards for safe driving. Within six weeks of monitoring, dangerous driving behaviors dropped 50 percent. Source: FleetNews, February 26, 2008

Warning System Lets Drivers Know When They Can Pass Safely

A Dutch researcher has developed an overtaking assistant, a system that indicates when it is safe for drivers to pass. The warning system displays a green light when there’s enough time to pass another vehicle; a red light is displayed if it’s not safe. The overtaking assistant was tested in a driving simulator, among other methods. When using the assistant, men were less likely to swerve into the other lane to see if the path was clear. The overtaking assistant will be available commercially in about 10 years, and will be most effective when used in conjunction with inter-vehicle communication. For more information, go to <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/02/080226092749.htm>
Source: ScienceDaily, February 27, 2008.

Report Recommends Reversing Strategies

Interactive Driving Systems released a new research report that provides practical steps to reduce the risks of backing up. Reversing often affects children, pedestrians and outdoor workers. All drivers, especially fleet drivers visiting customer sites and homes, need to exercise greater care when backing up. The report recommends that drivers walk around the vehicle to look for obstacles, be aware of pedestrians and children, back up slowly, look behind before starting the vehicle, and reversing into parking spaces instead of out of them. Source: Automotive Fleet, February 26, 2008

Work-Home

Bush Signs Kids Auto Safety Bill into Law

This week President Bush signed the first new auto safety law passed by Congress since 2005. The Cameron Gulbransen Kids Transportation Safety Act, which was approved by the House in December, passed unanimously in the Senate on Feb. 14. The new law requires the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to create a database of deaths and injuries of children in non-traffic but auto-related incidents. It also suggests the agency consider toughening regulations to prevent power windows from injuring children, as well as improved public education. The bill -- dubbed the "Kids and Cars Act" -- also requires NHTSA to study whether to require that power windows and door panels reverse direction when they detect an obstruction, much as automated garage-door openers do. If NHTSA doesn't complete a study within the next two and a half years, it would have to send a report to Congress explaining why. The bill, sponsored by Sen. Hillary Clinton, D-N.Y., is named after a 2-year-old New York boy who was accidentally run over and killed in 2002 when his father backed his SUV out of his driveway.

Legislation Would Let States Use Federal Funds to Focus on Motorcycle Helmets

U.S. Transportation Secretary Mary E. Peters sent legislation to Congress that would give states greater flexibility to target motorcycle helmet use. "We know helmets save lives, and I want states to be able to join in urging riders to take personal responsibility for their safety by wearing a helmet every time they ride," Peters said. The legislation would allow states to use federal motorcycle safety funding to promote helmet use. States are limited to using funds only for safety training and awareness programs. For more information, go to <http://www.nhtsa.gov/motorcycles/index.cfm>

ATV Deaths Reach 500 Plus in 2006

More than 500 people, nearly 20 percent of them children, died in all-terrain vehicle crashes in 2006. That number is expected to climb as the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) continues to receive information from coroners and hospitals nationwide. An additional 146,000 people were treated for ATV-related injuries in emergency rooms. "ATVs have never been shown to be an unsafe product, but there have been bad decisions made by people sitting on the seat," said the spokesman for Specialty Vehicle Institute of America. Pennsylvania, California, West Virginia, Texas and Kentucky reported the highest number of ATV deaths since 1982. Most of the deaths and injuries to children are the result of their riding on adult-size ATVs. In almost 60 percent of fatalities, riders were not wearing helmets. For more information, go to

<http://www.burlingtonfreepress.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080214/NEWS/80214009>

Source: Associated Press

More Teens Wait to Get Driver's Licenses

Fewer teens are getting their driver's licenses at 16. In the last decade, the proportion of 16-year-olds who have licenses dropped from about half to less than a third, according to the Federal Highway Administration. "It's a big change in a major American ritual of driving as early as possible," said an expert on car culture. There are several reasons for the trend, such as tighter graduated driver-licensing laws, higher insurance costs and a shift to expensive private driving schools. For more information, go to

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/25/business/25drive.html?ex=1361595600&en=9f1e8520535af0e2&ei=5090&partner=rssuserland&emc=rss&pagewanted=all> Source: The New York Times, February 25, 2008

Center Helps Spur National Research on Young Drivers

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill established the Center for the Study of Young Drivers (CSYD) in 2006 to study and improve the safety of young drivers. Its focus is on developing an understanding of all the factors that contribute to young drivers' high crash rate. Since its inception, CSYD has helped promote a more scientific approach to studying young driver behavior and encouraged the formation of a new Transportation Research Board subcommittee. That young driver subcommittee is organizing a workshop in which experts will develop a research agenda for the next several years. For more information, go to <http://www.csyd.unc.edu/index.html>

Source: UNC Highway Safety Research Center Directions, Winter 2008

Research

Researchers Find Ignition Interlocks Help Reduce Future Drunk Driving

A new study found that completing an alcohol ignition interlock program (AIIP) is more effective than conventional license revocation in reducing recidivism of drunk driving. Participants in the AIIP group had lower rates of alcohol consumption compared to the control group one and three years after the DWI offense. In the post-treatment period the rate of recidivism was about 60 percent and the rate of police-reported crashes was 80 percent lower than during the five-year period before the offense. The control group showed a similar reduction in crashes, but not recidivism. Source: SafetyLit, February 18, 2008

Exposure to Different Media Affect Teens' Perceptions about Driving Behaviors

A recent study about teens' television habits and risky driving habits shows that more news viewing is associated with a higher perceived risk of drunk driving and speeding. Those who watched more music videos negatively associated the dangers of speeding and driving under the influence. Action movie viewing did not significantly impact attitudes. Thousands of teen boys and girls completed a questionnaire on television viewing, risk perception and the intention to speed and drive after drinking. Girls regarded speeding and drunk driving as more dangerous than boys did.

TRB Releases Report on Human Side of Crash, Congestion Reduction

The Transportation Research Board's second Strategic Highway Research Program (SHRP 2) released a summary document that includes an overview of the program and examines the four research areas: safety, renewal, reliability and capacity. The research aims to have significant impact on traffic congestion, highway deaths and quality-of-life issues. For more information, go to http://www.trb.org/news/blurb_detail.asp?id=8608