Transportation Safety Accident Prevention II

Driver fatigue and aggressive driving are two of the main causes of vehicle crashes in the U.S. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates that there are 56,000 – 100,000 sleep-related road crashes annually in the U.S. Almost 96% of annual drowsy driver crashes involve drivers of passenger vehicles and these crashes result in 40,000 injuries and 1,550 fatalities each year.

What causes fatigued driving? After two or three hours of driving, the central nervous system usually becomes fatigued, the senses become dulled and perception levels are lowered. Drowsiness while driving is caused by lack of visual or physical stimulation while body and physical fatigue are caused by sitting in a forced posture in a fixed position with insufficient back support. Fatigue reduces reaction time, alertness and concentration so that the ability to perform attention-based activities is impaired.

The main risk groups of fatigued drivers include:
- Male drivers aged 16-29
- Shift workers, students
- People with sleep problems
- People who drive between midnight and 6:00 a.m.

Risk factors that increase the possibility of fatigue include:
- Sleep loss
- Driving a substantial number of miles each year
- Driving a substantial number of hours each day
- Driving in mid-afternoon hours especially for older people
- Use of sedating medications
- Consumption of alcohol
- People who suffer from sleep apnea or narcolepsy

Roads which involve sustained monotonous driving, with little visual stimulus for the driver, are more likely to have sleep-related accidents. Some danger signals of fatigued driving include:
- Your eyes close or go out of focus by themselves
- You have trouble keeping your head up
- You can’t stop yawning
- You have wandering, disconnected thoughts
- You don’t remember driving the last few miles
- You drift between lanes, tailgate, or miss traffic signs
- You keep jerking the car back into the lane
- You have drifted off the road

For information on accident prevention, please contact Employers Association, Inc. at 763-253-9100.
Drivers have used a variety of tactics over the years to try and keep alert such as opening windows, turning up the radio, etc. but in studies, the only common tactics that had any affect beyond 10-15 minutes were intake of caffeine of at least 150mg and a nap of around 15 minutes.

To reduce fatigue-related driving crashes, drivers need to recognize the:
- Dangers of driving when tired
- Signs of becoming too tired to continue driving
- Ineffectiveness of common tactics
- Relative effectiveness of caffeine and naps
- Need to plan journeys
- Need to rest well before long journeys
- Increased risk that drugs, alcohol, medications, and illness generate
- Types of journeys that carry the highest risk

An aggressive driver is one who is described as "A person who operates a motor vehicle in a selfish, bold or pushy manner, without regard for the rights or safety of the other users of the streets and highways". Almost 13,000 people have been injured or killed from 1990 to 1997 in crashes caused by aggressive driving. Types of aggressive driving behaviors include:
- Tailgating
- Flashing their lights, honking horns
- Making hand and facial gestures
- Running stop signs, disobeying red lights
- Making frequent, unnecessary lane changes
- Passing on the right
- Excessive speed
- Passing a stopped school bus
- Racing another driver

The causes of increased aggressive driving relate to more vehicles being on the road, the number of vehicle miles driven each year is up 35% in the last ten years, people are busier and time is at a premium, and road congestion causes frustration. Aggressive driver frustration levels are high and their vehicle provides anonymity, allowing them to take out their frustrations on other drivers. They consider vehicles as objects and fail to consider the human element involved; therefore, they seldom consider the consequences of their actions. Aggressive drivers generally blame others and do not see themselves as a problem.

The worst case of aggressive driving can lead to verbal abuse and physical assault. Road rage is the angry and violent behaviors at the extreme of the aggressive driving spectrum. These violent acts may range from a physical confrontation to an assault with a motor vehicle or possibly a weapon.

From January 1990 to September 1, 1996, there were at least 10,037 incidents of reported road rage in the United States.

Two hundred and eighteen men, women, and children are known to have been murdered and 12,610 people injured as a result of these 10,037 incidents:
- In approximately 4,400 of the 10,037 known incidents, the perpetrator used a firearm, knife, club, fist, feet or other standard weapon for the attack
- In 2,300 cases the aggressive driver used their own vehicle
- In 1,250 cases the aggressive driver used their own vehicle and a standard weapon like a gun, knife, or club.

If you have an encounter with an aggressive driver:
- Remain calm
- Keep your distance
- Do not pass unless you have to
- Change lanes once it is safe (don't jump lanes without looking)
- If you cannot change lanes and an aggressive driver is behind you, stay where you are, maintain the proper speed and do not respond with hostile gestures.
- You may call 911 (or *911 from a cell phone) to report an aggressive driver or a driver you believe may be impaired.