

MOVE TO DAYLIGHT SAVINGS INCREASES DROWSY DRIVING RISK

The National Road Safety Foundation offers tips to stay awake at the wheel

NEW YORK, March 7, 2014 -- The change to daylight savings time this weekend brings more than an extra hour of daylight. It also brings an increased risk of drowsy driving, which is recognized as a significant factor in crashes on our roads and highways.

The National Road Safety Foundation warns drivers to be extra cautious at this time of year and to be especially aware of driver fatigue. The time change can disrupt normal sleep patterns, increasing the possibility of drowsiness behind the wheel.

Drowsy driving results in more than 100,000 crashes every year, causing about 1,500 deaths, 71,000 injuries and more than \$12 billion in losses, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

"Drowsy driving can be as dangerous as drinking and driving," said David Reich of The National Road Safety Foundation, a non-profit organization that produces and distributes free driver safety education programs. Studies show 60 percent of motorists have driven while fatigued and more than a third admit to having fallen asleep at the wheel. "Rolling down the windows or blasting the radio won't keep you awake if you are sleep-deprived," Reich said. "Those tactics simply don't work."

The brain may compensate for fatigue by taking micro-sleeps for a few seconds or longer. During a three or four-second micro-sleep, a car at highway speed can travel the length of a football field, veering out of its lane and into oncoming traffic or off the road and into a tree. Sleep-induced crashes are often very serious, since a dozing driver may not take evasive or corrective action as the vehicle leaves its lane.

Drivers should recognize the signs of drowsiness:

- Difficulty focusing
- Frequent blinking
- Not remembering the last few miles driven
- Head nodding
- Repeated yawning or rubbing eyes
- Drifting out of lane, tailgating or going over rumble strips.

A driver who experiences any of these warning signs should pull over at the next safe spot, take a break and, if possible, a 20-minute nap. Have a cup or two of coffee or a caffeinated snack and allow 30-minutes for the caffeine to enter the bloodstream. Don't drink alcohol or take medications.

The National Road Safety Foundation, Inc. (NRSF), a non-profit organization founded more than 50-years ago, produces traffic safety programs on distracted driving, speed and aggression, impaired driving, drowsy driving, driver proficiency, senior driving, pedestrian safety and a host of other safety issues. It distributes the programs free of charge to schools, police and traffic safety advocates, community groups and individuals. It also sponsors contests to engage teens in promoting safe driving to their peers and in their communities. For more information or to download free programs, visit www.nrsf.org or www.teenlane.org