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Change to Daylight Savings Increases Drowsy Driving Risk

National Road Safety Foundation offers tips to stay alert at the wheel

NEW YORK, March 5, 2020 -- Daylight savings time, which begins this weekend, brings an increased risk of drowsy driving, recognized by traffic safety experts as a significant factor in crashes nationwide.

The National Road Safety Foundation cautions drivers to be especially aware of driver fatigue as daylight savings begins. The time change can disrupt normal sleep patterns, increasing the possibility of drowsiness behind the wheel.

"Drowsy driving can be as dangerous as drinking and driving," said Michelle Anderson of The National Road Safety Foundation, a non-profit organization that produces and distributes free driver safety education materials.

Drowsy driving is a factor in more than 300,000 crashes every year, causing more than 5,000 deaths, 109,000 injuries and more than \$30 billion in losses, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. A study by the AAA puts those numbers even higher, claiming drowsy driving crashes have been under-reported by eight times.

Studies show nearly two-thirds of motorists have driven while fatigued and more than a third admit to having fallen asleep at the wheel. The Governors Highway Safety Association last year estimated more than 83 million sleep-deprived Americans were driving on a typical day.

Sleep experts say 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 person's eyes may remain open, but the brain is not processing the eyes' vision signal. During those three or four seconds, 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.

"Some commonly-held reliefs for drowsiness, like rolling down the windows or blasting the radio, simply don't work if you are sleep-deprived," Anderson said. "The best thing is to find a safe spot to pull over and take a break and, if possible, take 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, which can bring on drowsiness."

Information about drowsy driving, including a personal "Sleep Diary," is available at no charge from <http://www.nrsf.org/programs/drowsy-driving>.

The National Road Safety Foundation, Inc. (NRSF) is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit charitable organization that for nearly 60 years has been dedicated to reducing crashes, deaths and injuries on our nation's highways by promoting safe driving habits through greater public awareness.

NRSF produces documentaries, educational programs and public service campaigns for broadcast and for use in safety, educational and enforcement programs by police, teachers, traffic safety agencies, healthcare professionals, youth advocacy groups and other grass-roots related agencies, as well as federal, state and local government agencies. NRSF programs, which are free, deal with distracted driving, speed and aggression, impaired driving, drowsy driving, driver proficiency and pedestrian safety. The Foundation also works with youth advocacy groups and sponsors contests to engage teens in promoting safe driving to their peers and in their communities. For information or to download free programs, visit www.nrsf.org or www.teenlane.org.

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