

Since the inception of ICRMP in 1985, our most frequent cause of Property/Casualty claims has been auto claims. No other claim category comes close. The bad news: auto crashes are frequent and severe for Idaho local government agencies. The good news is that auto crashes can be reduced by focusing on safe driving!

Drowsy Driving

Just like drugs or alcohol, sleepiness slows reaction time, decreases awareness, and impairs judgment. Just like drugs or alcohol, it can be fatal when driving.

The drivers at highest risk are: people that drive a substantial number of miles each day, those with unrecognized sleep disorders, those prescribed medication with sedatives, and shift workers.

Of drivers surveyed by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 37% admitted to falling asleep at the wheel at some point in their driving career. A new study on drowsy driving recently released by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety found that two out of every five drivers admit to having fallen asleep at the wheel at some point, with one in ten saying they've done so in the past year. NHTSA crash data analysis estimates that about one in six deadly crashes involve a driver who is drowsy.

Recognize the symptoms of fatigue:

- Eyes closing or going out of focus
- Persistent yawning
- Irritability, restlessness, impatience
- Wandering or disconnected thoughts
- Inability to remember driving the last few miles
- Drifting between lanes or onto shoulder
- Abnormal speed, tailgating or failure to obey traffic signs
- Back tension, burning eyes, shallow breathing or inattentiveness.

Safety Tips:

- Maintain a regular sleep schedule that allows adequate rest.
- When the signs of fatigue begin to show, get off the road. Take a short nap in a well-lit area. Do not simply stop on the side of the road.
- Drive with your head up, shoulders back and legs flexed at about a 45 degree angle.

Source: National Safety Council. Permission to reprint granted by the National Safety Council, a membership organization dedicated to protecting life and promoting health.

Depending upon your job and the level of risk involved, a split second delay in reaction time or making the wrong decision because you are fatigued could result in serious consequences. You could be injured or you could cause injury to someone else. As a result, it is very important to find ways to deal with lack of sleep and drowsy driving.

Discuss:

1. Have you ever driven while you were drowsy?
2. What are some things you do when you feel sleepy when driving?
3. Have you or someone you know had a "close call" with drowsy driving?
4. Create a list of tips drivers can do when they feel sleepy when driving.