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Asleep at the Wheel by Hiteshbhoi

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The drowsy driver has become more of a hazard as commutes become longer and more frequent. In fact, the term is now being used to identify a problem that has killed over 300 people in California alone since 2002.

As we evolve into a 24 hour a day society and more workers join the long commute, the number of accidents and fatalities caused by drowsy drivers will increase, said Dr. Jane Stutts, formally of the University of North Carolina Highway Safety Research Center.

She says that a trance like state is produced about 30 minutes into the drive, when blood has drained from the brain and pooled into the lower extremities.

To avoid this syndrome, get your eight hours a night of good sleep. Even two hours of missed sleep can bring on the drowsy driver effect of loss of coordination, impaired judgment, slow reaction time and impaired attention span.

Although there has been reports of truckers falling asleep at the wheel, little attention has been paid to the long distance commuter until now. The National Traffic Safety Administration suggests that when you find yourself in this predicament, take a 15-20 minute nap or drink two cups of coffee. The usual remedies - open the car windows, turn up the radio, talk on the cell phone are not considered to work. To read more about this, click on this link:

Our thanks to Rocky Salmon of The Press-Enterprise for a timely report.

What's the Effect on the Rest of your Day?

If you've gotten to your destination without incident, the effects of drowsy driver syndrome doesn't just stop. It will continue, perhaps throughout the day. Poor problem solving, shortened attention span, difficulty with temper control, and depressed mood can all occur as a result of deprived sleep.

Few of us can get by on less than 7-8 hours of sleep nightly. Even one night of disrupted sleep can have a negative effect. But for those who regularly lose sleep, the effect will be consistent and progressive.

Return to the Five Steps to a Better Commute. We discuss the effect of loss of sleep and its partner, poor eating habits. Do something about this today before you become a statistic of drowsy driver syndrome. It may call for rescheduling or juggling your priorities. Perhaps other steps will be needed. But not only prevention of car accidents, but also physical, social and emotional health are in jeopardy as long as you don't get the sleep you need.

Tip: Your children are becoming commuters as they live farther from school. Check their sleep habits, especially middle and high schoolers, as well as their eating habits.

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