

Drowsy Driving

By Jim Roberson

Did you know that driving with sleep deprivation is almost as bad as driving while intoxicated? It's a fact! Although most traffic incident reports do not have a category for the cause of an accident as being drowsy, it is known to be a factor in 1 – 3 % of all police reported crashes and 4% of fatalities.

The body requires three things; food, water and sleep. You can starve yourself to death and can voluntarily dehydrate yourself, but you cannot overcome the need for sleep. The need for sleep is so powerful that the brain will eventually make you sleep. This is the problem. It creeps up on you; most people do not realize that they are falling asleep while driving. They drift in traffic, yawn constantly, squirm about and make up excuses for why these things are happening. In fact they do become more alert after the accident if it is not fatal. That is not a good risk for you.

The body clock signals you to be sleepy twice a day; first at bedtime and then 12 hours later at “siesta time”. The amount of daylight and darkness controls the setting of the internal body clock also known as the circadian rhythm. Here in the Northwest we have a problem with the daylight/darkness cycle. We have too much daylight in the summer and too little in the winter. But that is for another time to discuss SAD or Seasonal Affective Disorder.

What can you do? Start by recognizing the signs of drowsiness. Realize that drowsy driving can be just as dangerous as driving intoxicated. If you are sleep deprived one beer can have the same effect as a six-pack on a well rested person. Allow yourself to get enough rest daily. Don't think that you can “make up” for lost sleep. It doesn't work that way. You cannot build up an “account” of sleep hours and draw on it when necessary.

Keeping to a regular schedule even on weekends and holidays is one suggestion, others are

- avoid naps during the daytime,
- limit intake of caffeine during the evening,
- exercise regularly,
- don't drink alcohol when sleepy.

The statistics in this article were from *Drowsy Driving a wellness booklet from the American Academy of Sleep Medicine*. More information is available from www.aasmnet.org.

Do your best and most of all Ride Safe!!!