

The National Sleep Foundation and Cardinal Sleep Disorder Centers Remind Memorial Day Travelers that Alert and Alive is the Way to Drive!

Drowsy Driving a Dangerous yet Preventable Hazard for Holiday Drivers

WASHINGTON, DC, May 22, 2009 –Since Memorial Day kicks off the beginning of the summer vacation season, which according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) is the deadliest time of year for drivers, the National Sleep Foundation (NSF) and Cardinal Sleep Disorder Centers of America remind the public to stay alert at the wheel and beware of other sleepy drivers in order to arrive at their destinations safely.

“Many people fail to realize just how much sleep impacts alertness on the roadways. Not getting a good night’s sleep and driving can have deadly consequences,” said David Cloud, NSF’s chief executive officer.

According to NHTSA, driver fatigue is the direct cause of 100,000 car crashes each year, and the results are both deadly and costly: NHTSA estimates 1,550 deaths; 71,000 injuries; and \$12.5 billion in diminished productivity and property loss. Researchers believe that these numbers are underestimated, given that an estimated 1 million crashes are produced by driver inattention – a side effect of fatigue.

According to Connie Franzen, chief operating officer at Cardinal Sleep Centers, “it is just as critical to have the right amount of sleep as it is to abstain from alcohol when operating a vehicle.”

Drowsy driving is an all too common danger on America’s roadways. NSF’s 2009 *Sleep in America* Poll finds that more than one-half of adults (54%) – potentially 110 million licensed drivers– have driven when drowsy at least once in the past year. Nearly one-third of drivers polled (28%) say that they have nodded off or fallen asleep while driving a vehicle.

Are you feeling sleepy? Pull Over!

Though you may be alert when you first begin your drive, drowsiness may soon set in. The following warning signs indicate that it’s time pull over and stop driving:

- Rolling down the window or turning up the radio;
- Difficulty focusing, frequent blinking and/or heavy eyelids
- Drifting from your lane, swerving, tailgating and/or hitting rumble strips
- Yawning repeatedly
- Trouble remembering the last few miles driven
- Missing exits or traffic signs
- Trouble keeping your head up

Tips for drowsy-free driving

Here are some tips for avoiding a crash caused by drowsiness during Memorial Day weekend and year round:

- Get a good night's sleep before you hit the road. You'll want to be alert for the drive and for your vacation, so get to sleep early the night before you go.
- Don't be too rushed to arrive at your destination. Many drivers try to maximize the holiday weekend by driving all night or without stopping for breaks. However, crashes caused by sleepiness are among the most deadly. It's better to allow the time, drive alert, and arrive alive.
- Use the buddy system. Just as you should not swim alone, avoid driving alone for long distances. A buddy who remains awake for the journey can take a turn behind the wheel and help identify the warning signs of fatigue.
- Take a break every 100 miles or 2 hours.
- Avoid alcohol and medications (over-the-counter and prescribed) that may impair driving performance and magnify the effects of sleepiness.
- Avoid driving at times when you would normally be sleeping.
- Pack a cooler filled with caffeinated beverages. Caffeine takes effect in about 20-30 minutes. If you start to feel sleepy, drink a caffeinated beverage and then pull over for a 30 minute nap before getting back on the road.

For information about drowsy driving, visit www.sleepfoundation.org.

To learn more about sleep disorders and to take a self-sleep evaluation, visit Cardinal Sleep Centers at www.cardinalsleep.com.

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