

Driver Safety Letter

presented by



Here Comes the Sun

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To paraphrase the Beatles, "...it's been a long, cold, lonely winter." But with the start of Daylight Savings Time this past weekend, most Americans have set their clocks ahead one hour. While it's easy to see the benefits of longer days and more time in the daylight, few drivers stop to ponder the added challenges.

The short-term dangers in the first few days after the time change involve an increase in drowsy driving caused by a reduction in sleep. The hour we lose when clocks "spring forward" every spring offers our already sleep-deprived country a glimpse into the dangers of operating vehicles while fatigued. Perhaps the most basic requirement for safely operating any vehicle is to be awake, and though necessary, just being awake is not sufficient. Safe travel requires every vehicle operator to have obtained optimal sleep and be wide-awake and maximally alert, every time.

According to the National Transportation Safety Board, there is a 17% increase in crashes on our roadways on the Monday following the time change. "But fatigue safety risks are a life-threatening concern far beyond this annual clock change," according to NTSB. "Every year, an estimated one million roadway crashes and near-misses are likely fatigue-related, with thousands of people losing their lives and being injured. Fatigue-related tragedies are played out across every hour of the day throughout our nation's transportation system."

Longer term, the dangers of the return of Daylight Savings Time involve the sun shining directly into your eyes, leaving many motorists driving with a glare caused by the sun. Driving into the sun just after sunrise and just before sunset can make it much harder to see ahead.

What can you do?

- Invest in polarized sunglasses. They can help reduce glare.
- Make sure your dashboard is clean and clear of clutter
- Use your sun visor. It can help to block out the sun.
- Leave more following room. When the sun is in your eyes, you can struggle to see what the car ahead is doing. This is one more time when it pays to leave more room between you and the next vehicle.
- Drive with your headlights on to increase your visibility to other drivers.
- Know that the warmer weather and the longer days mean more people on the road that may be fatigued or not paying attention themselves.

Remember to get the sleep you need. Most sleep experts recommend a minimum of 7 hours of sleep a night. Plan ahead to avoid being sleepy, complacent and inattention. Your life, and the lives of those around you on the nation's highways, depends on it.