

Driver Safety Letter

presented by



Night Driving

January 2019

As a professional driver, you understand that it takes maximum defensive driving skills to drive safely at night. Add rain to the mix and the risk multiplies. Safe night driving requires preparation, alertness, and a heavy dose of common sense.

According to National Safety Council research, driving at night more dangerous than any other time of day. In fact, the risk of a fatal crash is three times greater at night. During winter, there are simply more hours of darkness than at any other time of the year. This presents numerous challenges including limited visibility, compromised peripheral vision, and potentially more fatigued driving. In addition, roadway lighting and highway markings are often poor.

In addition, as we grow older, we have greater difficulty seeing at night. A 50-year-old driver may need twice as much light to see as well as a 30-year-old. At age 60 and older, driving can become even more difficult, according to the American Optometric Association.

Further, fatigued drivers are more prevalent at night. The National Sleep Foundation¹ says 60% of adults have driven while they were tired, and another 37% have fallen asleep behind the wheel. The reasons are many – shift work, lack of quality sleep, long work hours and sleep disorders.

These statistics are backed up by a report by NHTSA that 100,000 police-reported crashes are a result of driver fatigue. Most crashes or near-misses happen at the times you would expect drivers to be tired: 4 to 6 a.m., midnight to 2 a.m. and 2 to 4 p.m., according to NSF. Drowsy driving puts everyone on the road at risk. Losing two hours of sleep has the same effect on driving as having three beers, and tired drivers are three times more likely to be in a car crash if they are fatigued. The sleep foundation offers this advice:

- Get seven or more hours of sleep a night
- Don't drive if you've been awake for 16 hours or more
- Stop every two hours to rest
- Pull over and take a nap if you're drowsy

Other night driving tips include:

- Reduce your speed and extend your following distance
- Keep your headlights and windshield clean.
- Don't overdrive your headlights. Especially when driving on smaller roads without reflector strips, follow a four-second rule. Take note of where the far reach of your low beams is, then count four seconds. If you pass that original place in less than four seconds, then you are going too fast. Two to three seconds may be an acceptable range for major highways with reflector strips. Remember that posted speed limits are for driving in daylight with dry road conditions.
- Use high beams wisely. The use of high-beam headlights when there isn't oncoming traffic can extend the time that you must react to hazards. Never use your high beams because the high beams of the oncoming car stay on. This will only increase the chances of a head-on crash.
- Don't look at oncoming headlights. Focus on the edges of oncoming traffic and bright objects, as staring directly into headlights can blind you for up to five seconds until your eyes adjust.
- Look around. Keep your eyes moving from side to side, rather than focusing only on the center line and the road ahead, to help your eyes stay adjusted to the dark and avoid falling victim to "highway hypnosis," a state in which reaction time is greatly impaired.
- If you're tired, get off the road and sleep. If you feel sleepy, caffeine can never be a substitute for sleep, nor is loud music or rolling down the windows.

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