Driver fatigue sample policy

Introduction
Fatigue can be a serious problem in any fleet safety program. Companies should establish policies for their drivers in order to minimize the fatigue experienced by their drivers. This document presents a sample company policy concerning driver fatigue.

Example

DRIVER FATIGUE POLICY
ABC TRUCKING COMPANY
ANYWHERE, USA

Several recent studies conducted by the American Trucking Association (ATA) and other organizations have reported new information on factors that contribute to driver fatigue and some effective countermeasures drivers can use to minimize the effects of fatigue.

Fatigue affects your driving performance even if you don't fall asleep at the wheel. In fact, fatigue causes driving problems even when you are not "feeling sleepy" and long before you actually go to sleep at the wheel. Truck drivers, like people in other professions, do not easily recognize and respond to the subtle signs of fatigue onset. As a consequence, drivers may often continue to drive beyond safe limits.

ABC Trucking recognizes that driver fatigue continues to be a major safety issue for transportation companies. Consider the following statistics:

1. A recent AAA Foundation study found that fatigue is the primary/probable cause of 41% of heavy truck related accidents.
2. The study showed that 31% of all accidents where the trucker driver was killed were attributed to driver fatigue.
3. 55% of all heavy truck related accidents occur between midnight and 6 a.m.

Signs of fatigue onset with truck drivers
- Your eyes close or go out of focus

The safety of our drivers and the general public has always been a high priority with this company, not a secondary issue. The purpose of this policy is to help our drivers better understand the factors that contribute to fatigue and to develop some effective ways to control fatigue. If you have any suggestions that will assist us in controlling driver fatigue at ABC Trucking, please talk with (safety director).
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- You have trouble keeping your head up
- You can’t stop yawning
- You have wandering, disconnected thoughts
- You have memory lapses - you don’t remember driving the last few miles; you were on “autopilot”
- Failure to check the rearview mirror as frequently as normal
- Erratic shifting
- Your speed becomes variable or unstable; driving too fast or too slow
- Drifting in and out of your lane of travel
- Missing a turnoff
- Other vehicles surprise you by their actions; passing you without you noticing their position
- You find yourself driving too close to the driver in front of you; completely unaware you are following too closely
- Braking far more often than is required by the traffic and road conditions

Be aware of these signs and be prepared to take countermeasures. Don’t ignore what your body is telling you. Continuing to drive in a fatigued state creates an unnecessary risk for you and others on the road.

What factors contribute to fatigue for truck drivers?

- Inadequate rest
- Sleep loss and or disrupted sleep (sleep disorders). This will be discussed in more detail later in this document
- Excessive stress and worry
- Excessive physical activity
- Monotony and boredom
- Displaced biological rhythms (circadian) this will also be discussed in more detail later in this document
- Excessive mental or cognitive work (thinking, reasoning, decision making)
- Your physical fitness – A physically fit person has better oxygen flow and stays more alert
- Endurance – Our level of energy and resistance to fatigue is improved if we are use to heavy work demands
- Character of task performed – Tasks that demand constant attention like driving cause fatigue faster
- Environmental conditions – Temperature, humidity, altitude, amount of light and noise, etc
- Driving in rain, fog or snow so increases our demand for attention and response that the effects of fatigue may be more dramatic. Driving in clogged rush hour traffic also increases driver fatigue
- Sustained hours or work (driving) – change in activity (break) can boost performance, but only to a point

It is critical for truck drivers to have knowledge of the factors or circumstances that commonly result in fatigue. Although we cannot avoid some of these factors, we should make a concerted effort to identify and reduce our exposure to the factors we do have the ability to control.
The circadian rhythm

One factor that is difficult to control is referred to as your Circadian Rhythm. This is a biological process that follows a cycle that occurs about every 24-25 hours. One result of your circadian rhythm is your sleep pattern. Several factors help your biological clock maintain a 24-hour cycle, but the most important factor is daylight and darkness. Consider these points:

- This cycle has “ups” and “downs”. These shifts affect body temperature, mood, motivation, energy level, and alertness. Regardless of the amount of sleep you have gotten or the activity you are involved in, you will more than likely feel some fatigue at the low point of your circadian cycle. This is usually early afternoon and during the night hours, specifically between midnight and 4 AM.

- This is of great importance to truck drivers, whose jobs often require driving at times their bodies “want” them to be asleep.

- Your driving performance is affected even if you have not been driving for a long time. When you drive during a circadian lull, particularly in the early evening hours, your performance is usually affected even if you are not fatigued.

- Through circadian rhythms, time of day interacts with fatigue. If you are fatigued from shortage of sleep, the effects at circadian low points are more pronounced.

- After severe sleep loss, the circadian cycle is the most important single factor that affects fatigue and performance. Knowing how the circadian rhythm operates can help you better understand your limits and take action to counter fatigue effects.

Important

Several recent studies have concluded that the #1 contributing factor to driver fatigue is Frequent Changing of a Driver’s Schedule. Extended duty periods longer than a “normal” work day result is prolonged wakefulness, fatigue induced by sustained or continuous operations, boredom and complacency. All are symptoms of a disrupted schedule. ABC Trucking will make every effort to assist our drivers in establishing a consistent driving schedule.
Like most trucking companies ABC Trucking must respond to customer demands. There may be times when a customer’s needs will require a driver to alter his/her schedule. We will endeavor to keep these incidents to a minimum and always ensure the driver can make the run safely and within Hours of Service guidelines.

**Proper sleep and driver fatigue**

Fatigue-induced impairment occurs as a direct result of your body’s need for rest and sleep. How much sleep does a driver need daily? This varies between individuals, but most drivers need between 6 and 8 hours per day.

ABC Trucking encourages our drivers to get their needed sleep. You are all adults. You don’t need to be in a restaurant visiting or participating in other activities when you should be sleeping. Consider the following information:

- Drivers must have adequate QUANTITY and QUALITY of sleep to avoid fatigue.
- Sleep requirements vary with age. Drivers 25 years of age and under require more sleep. In a recent study of fatigue related accidents, it was found that 55% of the drivers were under 25 years of age.
- The lack of sleep is not the only cause of fatigue, but it is probably the most important contributor.
- Truck drivers can continue to function without getting the right amount of sleep every night. However, if a driver fails to get “adequate sleep” over a three or four-day period, a “sleep debt” will accumulate. As sleep debt builds, drivers will suffer reduced alertness and increased drowsiness, which will seriously impair performance.

**Sleep Debt Accumulation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sleep Debt After 3 Days</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day 1</td>
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Sleep Debt Accumulation

Truck drivers must get adequate sleep on a consistent basis. This is easily said but not easily done. Some tips on getting adequate QUALITY and QUANTITY of sleep are discussed later in this document.

**Sleep disorders**

Sleep disorders is one reason some truck drivers do not get adequate sleep. Some drivers do not even realize they have a sleep disorder until it is too late.

- Drivers who suffer from sleep disorders do not get adequate QUANTITY or QUALITY of sleep. They may be in bed for 6 to 8 hours, but get only 3 to 4 hours of “good sleep”.
- How much “good sleep” is needed? A good “anchor” sleep should ideally last a period of 6 hours without disruption. Eliminating any disruption of sleep is critical for a professional truck driver.
What are some physical signs you may have a sleep disorder?

- Excessive daytime sleepiness
- You awaken feeling tired
- You become extremely sleepy or even fall asleep easily at inappropriate times
- Taking a long time to fall asleep at night
- Muscle soreness and stiffness upon wakening
- Excessive snoring or gasping (ask others)
- Kicking or thrashing while asleep (ask others)

Let’s take a look at some sleep disorders.

- **Onset Insomnia** - Difficulty getting to sleep. You may lie in bed awake for a long time
- **Maintenance Insomnia** - Waking up several times during a period of sleep
- **Termination Insomnia** - Waking up too early and not be able to go back to sleep
- **Drug-Dependency Insomnia** - Occurs as a side effect of overusing sleeping pills

What are some causes of insomnia?

- Worry and stress
- Disruption of the circadian cycle, or just trying to sleep at the wrong time in the cycle
- Drugs/medications
- Trying to sleep in an unfamiliar place
- Awkward sleep posture
- Uncomfortable room temperature
- Noisy environment
- Consuming caffeine before going to bed

Another sleep disorder that can create problems for truck drivers is sleep apnea. This is a condition that causes a driver to awaken several times during the night because breathing has ceased. The driver will awaken gasping for breath and go back to sleep completely unaware the episode ever took place. There are several types of sleep apnea:

- **Obstructive apnea** - soft tissues at the back of throat relax enough to close the airway
- **Central apnea** - interruption of the rhythmic contractions of the diaphragm and chest muscles
- **Mixed apnea** - combination of both obstructive and central apneas

Other sleep disorders:

- **Restless legs syndrome** - Discomfort to lower limbs that causes driver to move his legs, disturbing sleep. May be hereditary.
- **Narcolepsy** - Driver may fall asleep at inappropriate time. Commonly called “sleep attacks”. Central nervous system failure that causes a driver to suddenly enter into REM sleep. Will last up to 30 seconds.
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A serious by-product of extreme fatigue as a result of sleep disorders is commonly referred to as Fatigue Related Microsleeps.

- The driver’s eyes are open, but the brain waves are in Stage 1 sleep. The driver’s reaction time is markedly slower or he may fail to respond at all.

- These are NOT short, unnoticed naps. Eyes are open, but brain waves are in light sleep. In effect “there is no film in the camera”.

- As sleep loss becomes more severe, the frequency and duration of microsleeps increases.

Important

Drivers who suffer from a sleep disorder such as insomnia or sleep apnea run a higher risk of being drowsy while on duty and are more prone to impairment from fatigue. If you think you may have a sleep disorder, contact (safety director) immediately. You will receive any assistance needed to address this problem. Failure to report a sleep disorder creates a dangerous situation for you and the traveling public. Do not take the risk!

How can truck drivers minimize or control the effects of fatigue?

Some drivers will resort to some type of sleeping pill to help them go to sleep. ABC Trucking does not recommend the use of any sleeping pills.

- Sleeping pills have serious limitations as aids to sleep. The body may adapt to the drug’s affects, creating a need for stronger drugs. Frequent use may create a need for higher and higher doses.

- Sleeping pills tend to produce a morning “hangover” referred to as “sleep inertia”.

In addition to sleeping pills, some drivers have experimented with a synthetic hormone called Melatonin.

- Melatonin is a hormone produced in the brain during darkness that is believed to play a role in making us sleepy. As the sun sets and darkness begins, a surge of melatonin goes to all parts of the body.

- A man-made synthetic, melatonin is easily available in pill form at health food stores. Because this is not considered a drug, the FDA does not regulate its production and distribution.

- As little as 1/10 of a milligram of Melatonin seems to assist us to fall asleep.

- Most health food stores sell synthetic Melatonin in 1 to 5 milligram tablets (a 10 times higher dose that is required to induce sleep).

- Always consult your physician before taking Melatonin or any other sleep aid. If you choose to use a sleeping aid such as melatonin, notify (safety director) of this use.

Some drivers believe ALCOHOL is an effective sleep aid. Nothing can be further from the truth.

- Some people try to use alcohol as an aid to getting to sleep as if it were a sleeping pill.

- Alcohol influences the type and quality of sleep we actually get.

- Alcohol suppresses REM (an important part of the sleep cycle), leading to disrupted sleep and withdrawal effects.

- Alcohol can interact with sleep loss to increase drowsiness.

- Generally, alcohol is NOT a very effective sleep aid.

Developing an effective sleep routine is the best way to ensure getting to sleep easily.

Tips on developing an effective sleep routine

- Healthy, regular sleep habits can help prepare your body and mind for improved sleep quality.
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- Minimize noise and other disruptive factors
- Sleep in a dark, quiet room
- Maintain a comfortable temperature
- Use a comfortable sleeping surface
- Develop a pre-sleep routine - reading, planning the next day, etc

Tips on increasing alertness

Truck drivers are always looking for creative ways to stay awake or to increase alertness.

Rule #1 with ABC Trucking is never resort to any type of narcotic/drug for this purpose. Some drivers resort to caffeine. Consider the following information:

- Caffeine is probably the most widely used stimulant. Caffeine can produce a relatively quick improvement in alertness.
- About 20-30 minutes after drinking 1 to 2 cups of caffeine-laden coffee, you will feel more alert.
- Caffeine affects the functioning of specific parts of the central nervous system.
- The body becomes adapted to the effects of caffeine, which means you have to increase the intake to obtain any helpful effects.
- Don’t drink coffee unless you need the lift during the “low level” in the circadian cycle. Social drinking of caffeine products when you don’t really need the “lift” will offset the effectiveness of the caffeine.
- Don’t consume caffeine at the “high” level of the circadian cycle.

Some drivers will take planned naps during a trip. Consider the following information:

- “Strategic Napping” is one way some drivers maintain their alertness.
- Pre-plan 30-40 minute naps during the day, preferably during the “low level” of the circadian cycle when the body is naturally drowsy.
- Napping more that 45 minutes commonly results in sleep inertia or drowsiness when you awaken. Set an alarm.
- Plan your route; pre-select known safe rest stops and target them for your scheduled naps.
- Some drivers prefer to consume a cup or two of coffee before a nap. In commonly takes 30 minutes or the caffeine to take affect. You get the benefits of the nap and the caffeine.
- Remember to “shake off” any sleep inertia after a nap.
- Obtaining sleep from several supplemental naps spread out during the day, when added to our shortened long-sleep, can help us accumulate our required 7-8 hours per 24-hours. A 5-6 hour anchor sleep is still required.
- This is not the preferred method of recuperative or restorative sleep, but it is better than obtaining no supplemental sleep.

Effective fatigue countermeasures

- Work with your customers and company management to develop schedules conducive to safe driving.
- Develop an effective sleep routine to ensure the adequate QUALITY and QUANTITY of sleep.
- Seek assistance with personal problems that may create excessive worry and stress which can contribute to fatigue.
- Watch your health. Maintain a proper weight. Exercise regularly and eat properly.
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- Take “strategic naps” when you feel sleepy.
- Understand the Circadian Cycle and plan your naps and driving accordingly.
- Use caffeine sparingly and within recommended guidelines.
- Develop a plan for staying alert in the cab.

Avoid drugs for inducing sleep or staying awake.

For more information, log in to the Risk Control Customer Portal at travelers.com/riskcontrol. (Need help? Read our Registration Quick Guide.) You also can contact your Risk Control consultant or email Ask-Risk-Control@travelers.com