2 Out of 5 Drivers Have Done WHAT?

Forty-one percent of all drivers admit they have fallen asleep while driving and 10 percent admit it has happened in the past year, according to the third annual AAA Foundation's Traffic Safety Culture Index.

In addition, more than a quarter of those surveyed admitted that in the previous month, they drove despite being so tired they had difficulty keeping their eyes open.

The net result? Drowsy driving contributes to more than 5,500 traffic deaths annually and is a factor in nearly 17 percent of fatal crashes, far higher than previously estimated, especially when compared with a 1994 analysis that found it was a factor in just 3.6 percent of fatal crashes. And even though so many people have confessed to drowsy driving, 85 percent of drivers acknowledge it is "completely unacceptable."

The biggest problem? Drivers are not always aware of the effects of fatigue resulting from a lack of sleep. "When you are behind the wheel of a car, being sleepy is very dangerous. Sleepiness decreases awareness, slows reaction time and impairs judgment, just like drugs or alcohol, contributing to the possibility of a crash," said AAA Foundation President and CEO Peter Kissinger. "We need to change the culture so that not only will drivers recognize the dangers of driving while drowsy but will stop doing it."

To remain alert and avoid drowsiness, AAA suggests:
- Get at least six hours of sleep the night before a long trip.
- Schedule a break every two hours or every 100 miles.
- Travel at times when you are normally awake.
- Stay overnight rather than driving straight through.
- Stop driving if you become sleepy. Someone who is tired could fall asleep at any time.

Symptoms of sleepiness include but are not limited to:
- Having trouble keeping your eyes open and focused;
- The inability to keep your head up;
- Daydreaming or having wandering, disconnected thoughts;
- Drifting from your lane or off the road;
- Tailgating;
- Yawning repeatedly;
- Feeling restless, irritable or aggressive.

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