A Guide for Reducing

Crashes Involving Drowsy and Distracted Drivers

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One of a Series of Guides to Help States Improve Highway Safety

Reducing Drowsy and Distracted Driver Incidents Can Favorably Affect As Many As 8 of 10 Crashes

The Problem

Distracted drivers are 50 percent more likely to be seriously injured or killed in a crash than attentive drivers, and those who fall asleep are more than twice as likely to be seriously injured or killed. Some 25 to 30 percent of all motor vehicle crashes are caused by drivers who are distracted, drowsy or fatigued, or whose minds are on something other than their driving, such as talking on a cell phone or applying makeup.

However, the true magnitude of the problem may be greater. One recent study found that nearly 80 percent of crashes and 65 percent of near-crashes involved some form of driver inattention within three seconds before the event. Because crash reports do not fully document distracted and fatigued driving, it is difficult to determine attention status for drivers who are killed and injured in crashes.

Analyses show that drivers under 20 are more prone to be distracted at the time of their crash, while those between 20 and 29 have the highest percentage of drowsy driving crashes. Seniors 60 and older are over-represented in “looked but didn’t see” crashes. Fatigue is a problem especially for long-haul truck drivers. As many as one-third of fatal-to-the-truck-occupant-only crashes have been attributed to driver fatigue.

There is no way to objectively determine whether someone is “too drowsy” or “too distracted” to drive. So, in addition to roadway improvements, a significant part of the challenge to reduce crashes is changing driver behavior. This is reflected in the Objectives identified for this emphasis area. The Strategies listed emphasize low-cost, short-term safety improvements for reducing collisions due to distracted and drowsy drivers.

Objectives and Representative Strategies

✓ Make roadways safer for drowsy and distracted drivers.

- Install shoulder and/or centerline rumble strips.
- Implement other roadway improvements to reduce the likelihood and severity of run-off-road and/or head-on crashes and other types of distracted and drowsy driving crashes.

✓ Provide safe stopping and resting areas.

- Improve access to safe stopping and resting areas, and security and services at rest areas.

✓ Increase awareness of the risks of drowsy and distracted driving.

- Conduct education and awareness campaigns targeting the general driving public.
- Visibly enforce existing statutes to deter distracted and drowsy driving.

✓ **Implement programs that target populations at increased risk of drowsy or distracted driving crashes.**

- Strengthen graduated driver licensing requirements for young novice drivers.
- Incorporate information on distracted/fatigued driving into education programs and materials for young drivers.
- Encourage employers, including trucking and other fleet operators, to offer fatigue management programs to employees.

✓ **Related strategies:** Public information programs, better enforcement of traffic laws, improving safety management systems, and strategies detailed in other emphasis area guides.

How the Implementation Guide Helps You

The guide lists practical countermeasure strategies categorized by relative cost to implement. Many of these strategies have been formally evaluated to demonstrate effectiveness. Others lack formal evaluation, but have been implemented with promising results.

The guide lays out the technical attributes of each countermeasure strategy in detail: target audience, expected effectiveness, keys to success, potential difficulties, appropriate measures and data, and associated need for support services.

The guide discusses organizational, institutional, and policy issues; issues affecting implementation time; costs involved; training and other personnel needs; and legislative needs (if any).

Web-Based Support for More Information

Backing up the guide is a series of appendixes and exhibits that provide in-depth information useful to anyone implementing this part of the Strategic Highway Safety Plan, together with a collection of documents providing background, data, and information of significant value to state and local implementers.

This guide is one in a series developed to assist states in their efforts to improve highway safety. Copies of the plan, the guides, the Integrated Safety Management System, the Self-Assessment Tool, and related documents, may be obtained on the Internet at **safety.transportation.org.**

DRIVING DOWN FATALITIES
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Printed copies of the guides and the Integrated Safety Management Process can be obtained from:

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