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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

New Study: Drowsiness a Major Contributor to Vehicle Crashes

November 2-8 is Drowsy Driving Prevention Week®

Area Sleep Expert Offers Advice to Avoid Driver Fatigue and Save Lives

SALEM, VA (November 2, 2009) – Nearly two million drivers in the past year were involved in a car accident or had a near miss because of sleepiness at the wheel, according to the National Sleep Foundation’s (NSF) 2009 Sleep in America poll. Even more surprising, the study revealed that 105 million people admitted to driving while drowsy at least once in the past year and 54 million do so regularly.

“People who drive when they are tired put their lives at risk, as well as the lives of others on the road,” said sleep expert Raquel Rothe, CRT-NPS, owner of Sleep EZ Diagnostic Center (www.sleepzcenter.com) in Salem, Va. “Fatigue can impair awareness and slow reaction time, similar to the effects of driving while intoxicated.”

In an effort to reduce the number of fatigue-related accidents, the NSF declared November 2-8, 2009 Drowsy Driving Prevention Week®. In its third year, this annual campaign is designed to heighten awareness about the under-reported risks, warning signs and countermeasures of driver fatigue.

To improve safety on the road, the NSF recommends that drivers take practical measures when they feel tired. The following warning signs indicate that it's time to stop driving and find a safe place to pull over and rest:

- Difficulty focusing, frequent blinking and/or heavy eyelids
- Trouble keeping your head up or yawning excessively
- Drifting from your lane, swerving, tailgating and/or hitting rumble strips
- Unable to clearly remember the last few miles driven
- Missing exits or traffic signs
- Feeling restless, irritable, or aggressive

“Most adults need between seven and nine hours of sleep for optimal health and performance. Adequate sleep is key to staying attentive and vigilant when performing tasks – and especially when driving a car or truck,” Rothe said. In tandem with the advice of the NSF, she offers the following tips to avoid driver sleepiness and prevent potential vehicle crashes.

- Get a restful night’s sleep before getting behind the wheel.
- Don’t drive at times you would normally be sleeping.
- Avoid alcohol before a road trip and talk with your healthcare provider about side effects of medications you are taking to ensure they don’t cause fatigue.
- During road trips, pull over and take a break every two hours.
- If you feel tired, stop at the next rest area or safe place and take a nap
- Avoid driving long distances alone. A passenger can take turns driving and help identify the warning signs of fatigue.

In addition, it may be helpful to take caffeinated beverages or caffeinated gum on long trips. The equivalent of two cups of coffee can increase alertness for several hours. However, consuming caffeine does not replace sleep; it only delays its onset.

“Nothing can replace getting a good night’s sleep – for driving or otherwise. If someone is experiencing difficulty falling or staying asleep night after night, it’s time to see a doctor. Lack of consistent, restful sleep can cause serious health problems in addition to increasing the risks associated with driver fatigue,” Rothe added.

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