OLD REPUBLIC

SMART DRIVER

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Managing Driver Fatigue: Supporting Safer Operations



Driver fatigue is an important safety concern in the trucking industry. Fatigue may affect reaction time, decision-making, awareness, and overall driving performance. For professional drivers operating commercial motor vehicles, managing fatigue could help reduce risk and support safer operations.

Understanding Driver Fatigue

Fatigue may result from physical or mental exhaustion and can reduce a driver's ability to operate a vehicle safely. Contributing factors could include insufficient or poor-quality sleep, extended work hours, irregular schedules, nighttime driving, certain health conditions, medications, and stress.

Because fatigue can develop gradually, drivers may not immediately recognize when their alertness or performance has declined. Education and clear reporting procedures could help drivers and supervisors identify and respond to fatigue-related concerns.

Potential Warning Signs

Possible warning signs of fatigue may include:

- Frequent yawning or blinking
- Difficulty concentrating
- Drifting within or outside the lane
- Missing traffic signs or exits
- Slower reaction times
- Feeling restless or irritable
- Experiencing microsleep, or brief, involuntary periods of sleep

Recognizing and responding to these warning signs could help reduce the likelihood of a fatigue-related incident.

Fatigue Management Considerations

Support Healthy Sleep Habits

Adequate, quality sleep is an important part of managing fatigue. Many adults may need seven to nine hours of sleep each day, although individual needs can vary. When possible, drivers could maintain a consistent sleep schedule and create an environment that supports restful sleep.

Drivers who regularly experience excessive sleepiness, poor-quality sleep, or difficulty remaining alert despite adequate rest should consider speaking with a qualified health care professional.

Follow Hours-of-Service Requirements

Hours-of-service regulations establish limits on driving and on-duty time and require specified rest periods. Drivers and motor carriers should comply with all applicable requirements.

Electronic logging devices may help drivers and motor carriers monitor hours-of-service compliance. However, an ELD does not measure a driver's alertness or determine whether the driver is fit to operate a vehicle safely.

Plan Trips with Fatigue Risk in Mind

Effective trip planning could allow drivers to schedule appropriate breaks, account for anticipated traffic or weather conditions, and prepare for potential loading or unloading delays.

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Encourage Healthy Daily Habits

Regular physical activity, balanced nutrition, and proper hydration may support overall health and alertness. Caffeine may temporarily increase alertness, but drivers should avoid relying on caffeine, energy drinks, open windows, or loud music as substitutes for adequate sleep.

Establish Clear Communication and Reporting Procedures

Motor carriers could consider establishing procedures that allow drivers to report fatigue-related concerns promptly and in good faith. Supervisors and dispatchers should respond to these concerns in accordance with company policies, applicable employment requirements, and established safety procedures.

A driver who becomes too fatigued to continue safely should follow company procedures, leave the roadway at the first safe and authorized opportunity, notify the appropriate supervisor or dispatcher, and obtain adequate rest before resuming operation.

Final Thought

Fatigue-related risk may be reduced through a coordinated approach that includes adequate rest, regulatory compliance, thoughtful trip planning, healthy daily habits, and clear communication.

Motor carriers may want to incorporate fatigue awareness into driver education, supervisor training, and operational planning. Consistent attention to fatigue management could support safer driving decisions, strengthen overall safety performance, and contribute to safer roadways.

Knowledge Verification ★ ★ ★ ★

Please answer, and forward a completed copy to your Safety Department/Safety Representative.

1. Driver fatigue may affect reaction time and decision-making ability. ☐ True ☐ False
2. Frequent yawning and difficulty concentrating may be warning signs of fatigue. ☐ True ☐ False
3. Energy drinks can replace the need for regular, quality sleep. ☐ True ☐ False
4. Healthy sleep habits, proper nutrition, hydration, and regular exercise may help support alertness and fatigue management. ☐ True ☐ False

Driver's Name:	Driver's Signature:	Witness Name:	Date:

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Knowledge Verification
1. True
2. True
3. False
4. True