

Waking Up to Fatigue Impairment

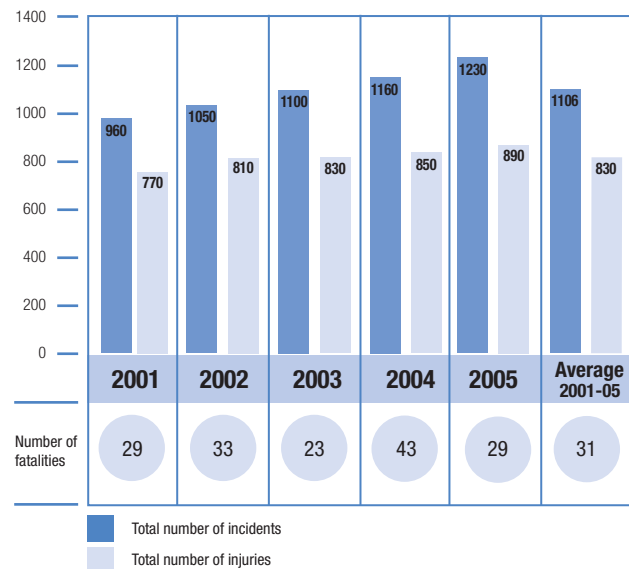
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Trends

2005 fatigue-related collisions (falling asleep/extreme fatigue) in B.C.

- Police-reported statistics show that 29 people died as a result of fatigue, down from 43 in 2004, and 890 people were injured, up from 850 in 2004.
- Fatigue was a contributing factor in two per cent of crash incidents, same as in 2004.
- Drivers most likely to be in incidents while fatigued were males 16 to 25 years old, followed by males 26 to 35 years old.
- Fatigue-related incidents are most likely to occur in July, followed by August.
- Fatigue-related incidents are most likely to occur between 3 a.m. to 6 a.m.

Fatigue-related incidents, injuries and fatalities (2001 – 2005)



2005 fatality count is not fixed. Fatality data continues to settle over time.

Drowsy Driving — the hidden killer

Similar to the way drinking driving emerged as a road safety issue 30 years ago, impairment by fatigue — or drowsy driving — is fast becoming a major concern in North America. It can be just as deadly as drinking and driving or unsafe speed.

According to the Transportation Safety Board of Canada (TSB), sleep and fatigue often leave no clues for investigators to trace. Unlike alcohol-related crashes, no blood, breath, or other test is currently available to determine levels of sleepiness at the time of a crash. This leaves investigators with little hard

data on which to base a conclusion of fatigue or sleep as a cause or contributing factor.

Despite the data limitations, experts suggest the actual number of fatigue-related collisions may be much higher — as high as 20 per cent to even 40 per cent. And that makes

drowsy driving as dangerous as drinking and driving, which accounted for 28 per cent of all victims in police-reported fatalities in 2005.



Characteristics of fatigue-related crashes

- Usually occur during late night/early morning or late afternoon.
- A single-occupant vehicle drives off the road (also may result in rear-end and head-on crashes).
- No skid marks, brake lights, horn sounded, or other evidence the driver tried to avoid the crash.
- The crash occurs on a high-speed road, usually a highway in non-urban areas where more long distance night-time driving occurs.
- The crash is likely to be serious, usually due to the high speeds involved, combined with delayed (if any) reaction time.

Although no driver is immune, three groups are at highest risk:

1. Younger people ages 16 to 25 years, especially males. A combination of lifestyle factors such as schoolwork demands, part-time jobs, extracurricular activities and late-night socializing.
2. Shift workers whose sleep is disrupted by working at night or working long or irregular hours.
3. People with untreated or unrecognized sleep apnea syndrome (SAS) or narcolepsy (sudden onset of brief attacks of daytime deep sleep, or micro-sleeps).

The warning signs

You're becoming impaired by fatigue if you experience some of these characteristics:

- Yawning, daydreaming.
- Difficulty keeping your head up, eyes open, blurry vision.
- Feeling sluggish, hungry, thirsty.
- Droning or humming in the ears.
- Don't notice a vehicle until it suddenly passes.
- Don't recall driving the last few kilometres.
- Driving speed creeps up or down.
- Wandering over the centre-line, into another lane or shoulder.

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Fatigue impairs driving performance in the following ways:

- **Slower reaction time.** Even slight decreases in reaction time can profoundly increase your chance of crashing, particularly at high speeds.
- **Reduced alertness.** Safely performing tasks declines with sleepiness, including increased periods of nonresponding or delayed responding.
- **Decreased ability to concentrate.** Processing and integrating information takes longer, short-term memory decreases and performance declines.

What drivers can do

The problem with fatigue is that it slowly develops and drivers often don't realize they're too tired to drive safely. Once fatigue sets in, there is little you can do about it except stop driving as soon as possible. Physical activity, loud music, opening a window or eating might provide a short boost of energy, but these really only mask fatigue. When drivers return to sit still and perform repetitive tasks such as driving, sleep returns quickly.

Plan to drive refreshed and alert

- The only cure for sleepiness is sleep. Get enough sleep.
- Don't drink even small amounts of alcohol when tired. Alcohol interacts with and adds to drowsiness.
- Avoid driving between midnight and 6 a.m. Scheduling a trip at another time is a simple way to reduce risk, especially if the drive is long.
- As soon as you become sleepy, the key is to stop driving. Let a passenger drive or stop and get adequate sleep before continuing a trip.
- Take frequent breaks if driving for long periods.
- Medications may cause drowsiness. Check with your pharmacist if you're taking prescription or over-the-counter drugs.