



## Survey of U.S. and Canadian Police Officers about The Public's Drowsy Driving Behavior

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), each year up to 100,000 police-reported crashes (about 1.5% of all crashes) involve drowsiness or fatigue as a principal cause, injuring at least 71,000 people, and killing at least 1,500. However, these numbers may likely underestimate the magnitude of drowsy driving crashes because of limitations in existing crash databases. Mounting evidence suggests the true numbers are much higher than these estimates, with studies in the United Kingdom indicating fatigue is a factor in over 15% of crashes.

Although numbers and percentages differ, most experts agree that drowsy driving is an important traffic safety issue and the public agrees. In a 2002 NHTSA-sponsored Gallup survey, 95% of the driving population considered drowsy driving by other people to be a threat to their safety. About 37% of respondents reported they had fallen asleep while driving at least once in their life, and 10% of those had done so within the past month.

In a 1999 AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety sponsored project, researchers from the University of North Carolina Highway Safety Research Center studied a sample of drivers who had recently been involved in drowsy driving crashes. One-fourth of drivers who had fallen asleep at the wheel reported sleeping an average of less than six hours per night. Only about 11% of drivers involved in crashes unrelated to fatigue, and less than 7% of drivers not involved in crashes reported sleeping so little. The full report is available at: <http://www.aaafoundation.org/pdf/sleep.PDF>.

During the first three months of 2004, the AAA Foundation surveyed U.S. and Canadian police officers, via the Internet, about drowsy driving. The survey was posted at a secure location on the AAA Foundation's Web site. Police organizations, including the International Association of Chiefs of Police, state and provincial departments of police (and others) informed officers of the Web location via e-mail announcements, telephone calls, newsletters, and Web page announcements and 2,269 police officers from the U.S. and Canada completed the survey.

More than nine out of ten officers (93%) responding to the survey believed that drowsy driving was a serious problem. Additional responses revealed:

- 88% had stopped a driver who they believed was drunk, but turned out to be drowsy
- 89% said drowsy driving is as dangerous as drunk driving
- 93% said drowsy driving is a serious problem for *passenger car drivers*
- 97% said drowsy driving is a serious problem for *commercial drivers*
- 95% believed that drivers who cause a crash because they are fatigued should be charged with a driving violation
- 96% believed more education is needed to inform drivers about the dangers of drowsy driving



To drive alert and arrive alive, the AAA Foundation suggests:

- Not driving when you are sleepy
- Stopping driving if you become sleepy while on the road. Drink a caffeinated beverage.
- Since it takes about 30 minutes for caffeine to enter the bloodstream, take a 20-30 minute nap while you're waiting for the caffeine to take effect
- Getting plenty of sleep (at least six hours) the night before a long trip
- Not planning to work all day and then drive all night
- Traveling at times when you are normally awake, and staying overnight rather than driving straight through.
- Avoiding sleepy times of day. Take a mid-afternoon nap and find a place to sleep between midnight and 6 a.m.
- Traveling with an awake passenger
- Scheduling a break every two hours or every 100 miles



Survey Limitations: Internet surveys have some inherent limitations, so these results should be interpreted with caution. Although this was a study of U.S. and Canadian police officers, it was not a representative sample, with respect to geography, types of police departments, or types of officers. Although the survey was not advertised to the public, and officers learned of the Internet location through police communications, it is likely that at least a few of the responses came from people who were not police officers. Finally, as in any survey research, it is unlikely that all respondents were completely candid. Despite these limitations, we believe that police officers do generally view drowsy driving as a serious traffic safety issue that warrants more attention.

For more information:

- AAA Foundation's free *Wake Up*" brochure: <http://www.aaafoundation.org/products/index.cfm?button=freeintro>
- National Sleep Foundation: <http://www.drowsydriving.org>
- NHTSA: [http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/drowsy\\_driving1/index.html](http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/drowsy_driving1/index.html)

The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety is an independent, publicly funded, 501(c)(3) charitable research and educational organization established in 1947 by the American Automobile Association. The AAA Foundation's mission is to prevent traffic deaths and injuries by conducting research into their causes and by educating the public about strategies to prevent crashes and reduce the impact when they do occur.