Drunk Driving Is Bad, Sleepy Driving Is Not Safer

By ACSH Staff — October 19, 2015

Most people are aware of the dangers of drinking and driving, but do not realize that driving while drowsy can be just as fatal.

Similar to alcohol, sleep deprivation slows reaction time, decreases awareness, impairs judgement and increases the risk of crashing. A recent study [1] presented at the 2015 Australasian Road Safety Conference stated that drivers under the age of 30 are more likely to get behind the wheel while drowsy, as compared to those that are drunk.

Being awake for 17 hours has the same effect on driving as a blood alcohol content (BAC) of 0.05 and 20 hours is the same as .1, the results stated. To draw their conclusions, scholars observed the perceptions of 114 adolescents (under the age of 30) and 177 drivers over 30 years of age while driving while drowsy compared to driving drunk. The data presented young drivers as more likely to drive while tired than drunk due to an awareness of the laws imposed on drunk drivers.

Twenty percent of crashes were linked to drunk driving but fatigued drivers caused an estimated 15 percent [2]. According to Chris Watling, Queensland University of Technology in Australia, we need better objective testing measures to identify sleep-related accidents.

There are no substantial laws in place that would dissuade a young driver from driving during this state, though in other studies sleepiness has been shown to significantly to impair a person’s cognitive and motor abilities.

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