

## **Accident Prevention Begins With Individual Awareness**

By Gary S. Rothstein - Mobile Awareness

Whether you drive a car, SUV, RV or long haul truck, it's vital to always bring along one item ... "safety awareness"! The safe operation of any vehicle is determined by the attentiveness, alertness and ability of an individual to focus on the task at hand. Increasing your own driver awareness can go a long way to help prevent the costly accidents, fatalities and material losses that affect us all.

### **Drowsy or Distracted, Both Are Deadly**

Impaired mental faculty due to limited sleep, mixed with high demands on alertness and attentiveness, makes for a dangerous combination, one that has been attributed to some \$12 billion in yearly costs and thousands of deaths (U.S. Department of Transportation). Driver distraction, or more precisely, driver lapses in attention caused by cell phones, MP3 players, GPS devices and other in-vehicle entertainment, has been named one of the leading safety hazards in the transportation industry. There is no shortage of overwhelming data supporting the need for more safety solutions to mitigate the horrific accidents and fatalities occurring as the result of drowsy or distracted driving. While new technologies are bringing better [safety products](#) to market, life saving changes can be made by increasing your individual knowledge about the causes of preventable accidents. Education is a powerful tool, understanding the dangers of unfocused driving may help you think twice. Before you end up on the wrong side of a senseless driving disaster, consider there were 43,443 deaths from motor vehicle accidents in 2005! My guess is numerous were preventable...

### **The Problem is Everyone's**

Over the last 50 years much has been discussed about the perils of sleep-deprived truck drivers, tired individual drivers and drivers not paying attention. Further complicated by the ever increasing number of trucks on the road, additional concerns arise as a result of the dramatic shortage of qualified drivers, moving an ever growing supply of consumer and consumable products. Moreover, the problem is not limited to truck drivers as is clearly detailed in a report from the NHTSA (National Survey of Distracted and Drowsy Driving Attitudes and Behavior, April, 2003). The survey findings show that most drivers at least occasionally engage in behaviors that draw some percentage of their attention away from their driving task. These behaviors include talking with other passengers (81%), changing radio stations or CDs (66%), and eating or drinking while driving (49%). making outgoing & taking incoming cell phone calls (25%) and dealing with children riding in the rear seat (24%). While it is estimated that more than a billion driving trips are made weekly by drivers engaging in each of these behaviors, fewer than one in four drivers perceive these particular activities as distracting or as making driving much more dangerous! Don't take the risk of ignorance; always give your full attention to driving whenever you navigate a motor vehicle.

### **Dangerous Vehicles, Large & Small**

It is a well known and documented fact (Commercial Motor Vehicle Facts, Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, April 2005) that commercial motor vehicle (CMV) driver alertness/drowsiness is a major safety hazard in modern day society. There are approximately 7.9 million large trucks on our roads today, some driven by drivers working excessive hours, complicated by a shortage of qualified truck drivers. Large trucks alone make up over 400,000 accidents a year with an average cost of over \$62,000.00 per incident. In 2002 alone the Total Cost of Fatigue-Related Crashes (in 1999 Dollars) exceeded \$2.3 billion! What is a lesser known and reported danger is the ever increasing number of overworked, overtired and highly distracted individuals driving noncommercial trucks, SUV's and cars numbering over 220 million vehicles. While these automobiles are smaller in size and weight, they are no less dangerous in the hands of a sleep deprived or inattentive driver.

### **Education Enhances Safety Awareness**

There are many sources of vehicle safety and accident prevention information available from the US government, such as the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) and the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA). If you are limited in time, I recommend reviewing the [Essential Data](#) articles listed on our web site ([www.mobileawareness.com](http://www.mobileawareness.com)) as a convenient reference. The information is updated frequently and covers many critically important driver safety topics. By taking the time to learn about the hazards and risks associated with driving, it becomes apparent how increased attentiveness can lead to accident avoidance.

Clearly a driver's ability to safely control a vehicle and be "aware" will continue to be tested as a result of the ever increasing distractions in our highly mobilized society. The fact remains that the safe operation of any motor vehicle is the responsibility of the driver. Doing your part to increase your alertness while driving, will not only make you a safer driver, it will benefit all that share our roads.

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