



Sleepy drivers targeted by national safety campaign

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SALEM - The first ever Drowsy Driving Prevention Week is being launched by the National Sleep Foundation for Nov. 5-11 in an effort to increase public awareness to the dangerous of sleepy driving. The program will emphasize young people and advocate for preventative measures at the state level. This is especially important with the switch from daylight-saving time and the changing seasons.

"I'm so glad to see this important public safety issue getting national attention", said State Rep. Jerry Krummel (R-Wilsonville).

Krummel wrote legislation in 2007 to make it a felony if while driving while fatigued, you kill someone. The measure also asked state transportation experts to conduct education programs on drowsy driving.

House Bill 3021 was drafted at the request of Lorna Kautzky, widow of 56-year old Eric Kautzky, who was killed by a sleepy driver in June 2005. Eric was riding his bike in the bike lane along Tualatin-Sherwood Road when a 19-year-old driver swerved hitting Eric from behind. The driver, who had only three hours of sleep the night before, didn't realize he hit someone and kept going. Lorna is now a member of the Governor's Advisory Council for DUII.

While HB 3201 did not even get a hearing during the 2007 Legislative Session, Krummel hopes the bill will be reintroduced in 2009. Nine other states attempted similar legislation this year. So far only one, New Jersey, has successfully enacted a law to punish drowsy drivers. It is called Maggie's Law after a 20-year-old college student who was killed 10 years ago by a driver who nodded off at the wheel.

"Our shock and sorrow was compounded when we found out there are no laws for driving while sleep impaired. To me this is unconscionable," said Lorna Kautzky. "Where is the accountability for the sleepy driver? We must work for responsible behavior from the sleep impaired drivers on our roads. The sleepy driver holds as much responsibility as any other driver."

The prosecutors in Eric's case were able to plea bargain with the offender, putting him behind bars 17 months for criminally negligent homicide.

The Oregon Clinic Pulmonary and Sleep Medicine Division joins the national effort this week to help answer questions and provide information at their Gateway Medical Office Building. They will also offer special parent-teen driving agreements.

Dr. Louis Libby from the Oregon Clinic explained, "A lot of recent research suggests that driving with sleep deprivation is just as dangerous as driving with an alcohol level over the legal limit. However, presently there is no law in Oregon against driving when significantly sleep deprived."

Drowsy driver information will be available between 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., Nov. 6-8, at the Gateway office, 1111 NE 99th Ave, Portland. Phone 503-963-3185 for more information.

"There has been much talk about the hazards of using a cell phone while driving, yet sleepy drivers cause three times more crashes in Oregon every year," pointed out Krummel. According to the Oregon

Department of Transportation, in 2005 there were nearly 600 crashes related to drowsy drivers, 10 fatalities and almost 500 injuries. That's a 20 percent increase in the number of collisions over the past five years. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration attributes over 100,000 crashes, 1,500 deaths and 71,000 injuries to sleepy drivers every year. Financially the costs run up to \$12 billion in monetary losses.

The National Sleep Foundation is an independent nonprofit group dedicated to improving public health and safety. This week's campaign includes information at www.drowsydriving.org and public service announcements.

A Foundation survey found 60 percent of drivers admitted to driving while sleepy in the past year, 20 percent actually dozed off at the wheel, 13 percent did so once a month and 4 percent confessed to having an accident because they were too tired to drive.

The focus on young drivers is especially critically because 55 percent of all crashes due to fatigue involved a driver 25 years old and under.

Even though there are no simple tests to measure sleepiness, Dr. Libby noted, "certainly there are clues - anyone who has gone more than 20 hours without sleep is probably a danger to drive.

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