



Tired, but still driving

Many car drivers tend to drive even though they themselves think they are too tired to do so. They are aware of the dangers this causes and know that they should stop to have a rest or ask someone else to drive. Nevertheless, they continue to drive. These are some of the conclusions from a survey about state awareness and fatigue.

State awareness is one of the Sustainable Safety principles and involves the capability of people to judge how well they can perform a task. We are concerned with traffic: how well can they perform in traffic: how capable do they consider themselves and how good are they really? State awareness is connected with risk awareness and calibration: How dangerous do road users consider a traffic situation to be, and how dangerous is it really? And how do they tune their behaviour to their capabilities in order to perform safely in traffic?

Often tired

A representative sample of more than 2,000 drivers between 18 and 70 years old used internet to fill in a questionnaire with several questions about their experiences with fatigued driving and how they deal with it. The study was intended to investigate the degree and the role of state awareness in fatigued driving. Like earlier studies, this survey found that fatigued

driving is very frequent. More than half the respondents indicated having driven during the past year at least once while they were a bit tired; a quarter admitted to having driven while being so tired that their eyes were dropping; and 4% said that in the past year they actually fell asleep while driving.

Strategies

Drivers recognize fatigued driving mostly from yawning, not being able to keep their eyes open, and loss of concentration. At that moment they could decide to stop driving and to have a short nap or to ask a passenger to take over the wheel. Drivers find these two strategies to deal with fatigue the most effective. They are also the most effective measures from an objective point of view. However, they are not the most widely used strategies: drivers mainly opt for letting fresh air into the car (open window or airco), talking to a passenger, having a stop to eat or exercise, or turning the music louder.

Continuing to drive

Drivers – at least in retrospect – seem to realize that they were too tired to drive and that fatigued driving is dangerous; 20% of the drivers indicate that there have been occasions in the past year that they started or continued to drive despite feeling that they should not. They say that they find fatigued driving just as dangerous as driving with too much alcohol, just as dangerous or even more dangerous than using the telephone while driving, and absolutely more dangerous than speeding. The most important reasons to start or continue driving anyway are that one needs to or wants to get home, that there is no one else in the car who could take over, and the belief to be able to make it home all right. This indicates that there appears to be state awareness – drivers realize that they are tired – but many of them accept the risk of fatigued driving, and start or continue to drive nevertheless.

Truck drivers

A small, non-representative sample of truck drivers also filled in the questionnaire. The sample consisted of 52 respondents, for the major part male international drivers on truck

trailer combinations. Truck drivers generally spend more time on the road than car drivers. They appeared to be tired behind the wheel more frequently and more often said to have fallen asleep while driving. Truck drivers also differ from car drivers in the strategies they use to deal with fatigue. For example, truck drivers

more frequently than car drivers indicate that they stop driving to rest or to sleep. Of course, the driving hours legislation also makes this compulsory. At the same time, truck drivers more than car drivers indicate that in the past year they had continued or started to drive although they felt they were too tired to do so.

Two reports have been published about driver fatigue. Both reports are in Dutch, but have an English summary.

Driver fatigue: prevalence and state awareness of drivers of passengercars and trucks: A questionnaire study among driving licence holders in the Netherlands. Ch. Goldenbeld, R.J. Davidse, J. Mesken & A.T.G. Hoekstra. (2011). R-2011-4. SWOV, Leidschendam.

Fatigue while driving: Inventory of causes, effects and measures. I.N.L.G. van Schagen. (2003). R-2003-16. SWOV, Leidschendam.