

Safety alert

Mines Inspectorate

Safety alert no. 246 (Version 1)
4 August 2010

Driving while fatigued

Mine Type: All Mine Types

Incident: A mines inspector was travelling south on the Bruce Highway when a vehicle travelling north veered onto the wrong side of the road and into his path. The road was narrow and winding and a loaded semi trailer was following closely behind the north bound vehicle.

With a head on collision very likely, the inspector took evasive action by braking heavily and steering the vehicle off the road. Fortunately the side of the road had recently been cleared in preparation for laying water pipes in a creek bed. The inspector's vehicle went down a steep embankment and travelled some 10 to 15 metres off the highway before coming to rest on a pile of dirt beside the creek bed. Wheel tracks showed that the vehicle travelled over the stumps of two large trees recently cut down. Fortunately, there was no injury to the driver or significant damage to the vehicle.

Equipment: Highway vehicles

Hazard: Driving while fatigued.

Cause: Driver of vehicle was fatigued.

Comments: The driver of the offending vehicle was found to have had a micro sleep, and his passenger was also asleep. They were only 90 minutes into a five hour journey to a Central Queensland mine. Two disturbing issues arose from this incident. Firstly, two obviously fatigued persons have decided to undertake a five hour journey without any thought to the extreme risk they posed to themselves and other road users. Secondly, after making this journey, they intended starting work on a twelve hour shift, putting themselves as well as their work mates at risk.

With mining operations now offering rosters that allow mine workers to settle in coastal communities and commute to the mines, an alarming number of fatigue related accidents have occurred to mine workers travelling to and from work. The temptation to leave home in the early hours of the morning to give you a little more time at home is just not worth the risk, nor is driving home just after completing your roster if doing so will see you driving fatigued. You might think that you feel ok and will be fine to drive, but signs of fatigue appear quicker than you anticipate.

No matter how much you miss your families and loved ones while at work, they will miss you even more if you're taken from them in an accident. On this day, two people decided to drive knowing they were fatigued, and but for luck, came close to ruining the lives of many. Too many times we think 'it won't happen to me', but think again, **IT WILL.**

Recommendations:

1. It is important to recognise the warning signs of fatigue and take appropriate action. If you know you'll be tired, plan ahead and arrange alternative transport. Being awake for more than 16 hours is similar to having drunk more than two standard drinks (and having a blood alcohol content of more than .05 per cent). Don't put yourself at risk.
2. **Before driving:**
 - get plenty of sleep
 - plan ahead — work out rest stops and overnight stops
 - avoid alcohol
 - check medications with your doctor and make sure they won't make you drowsy
 - eat sensibly — not too little, not too much
3. **When driving:**
 - take regular breaks — you should stop for at least 15 minutes every two hours
 - share the driving if you can
 - use rest areas, tourist spots and driver reviver stops
 - stop and rest as soon as you feel tired
 - never drive for more than 10 hours in a single day
 - get plenty of fresh air

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Please ensure all relevant people in your organisation receive a copy of this Safety alert. Any such advice supplied to site should reach those who require it, and it should also be placed on the mine notice boards.

See more Safety alerts and Safety bulletins at
www.dme.qld.gov.au/mines/safety_information___bulletins.cfm