



## Fatigue Survey of BC Truck Drivers

Between July and August of 2005 a survey was conducted by WorkSafeBC to measure the impact of fatigue on BC truck drivers. Surveys were distributed and collected at truck stops throughout the province by WorkSafeBC officers. In total, 336 surveys were collected from truck drivers working in many different industries.

The following survey findings\* were presented at the September 2005 TruckSafe symposium. The information was positively received and there was a great deal of interest by all in attendance. The audience included truck drivers, training schools, union representatives, industry representatives, the RCMP, and city police. As a result of this project, all parties were eager to move forward with initiatives to address the hazards of fatigue.

### Driver Profile and Daily Schedule

The survey respondents were primarily driving their trucks for industries such as retail / wholesale, warehousing, construction, forestry, oil and gas, and agriculture. To a lesser extent, there was also representation from moving and storage, fisheries, refuse and waste removal, dump truck operations, and local government.

Almost 95% of the survey respondents were male, while half were aged 45–64 years old and half had 20+ years of driving experience. In addition, half of the respondents were working as employees, driving semi-trailers, or being paid per kilometre or per tonne. Almost 40% drove 500–800 km per day, while another 37% drove more than 800 km on average each day.

The typical respondent's daily schedule involved starting the day between 6 a.m. and 8 a.m. after sleeping 5–6 hours, and then driving for 10-12 hours. While one-third reported driving four or five days in a row, almost 30% reported driving more than 10 days consecutively.

### Significance of Fatigue

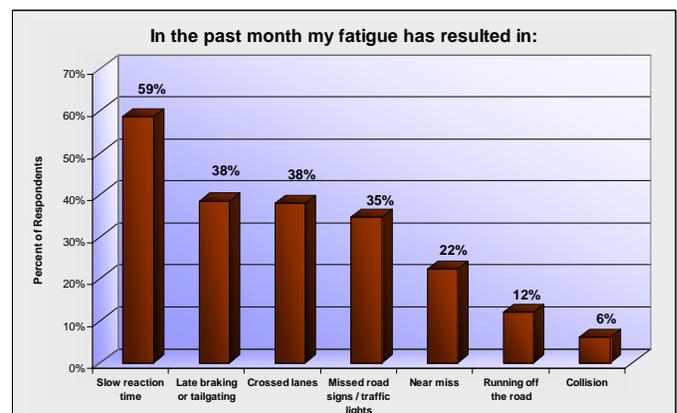
**Three out of every four truck drivers feel that fatigue affects the safety of their work-related driving.**

There appears to be a genuine concern regarding driver fatigue. The significant majority of truck drivers report that they are concerned about fatigue, they believe it affects the safety of their driving, and they believe other truck drivers are also concerned. And yet, almost half of the employee drivers do not feel that their employer believes fatigue is an important safety issue.

### Effects of Fatigue

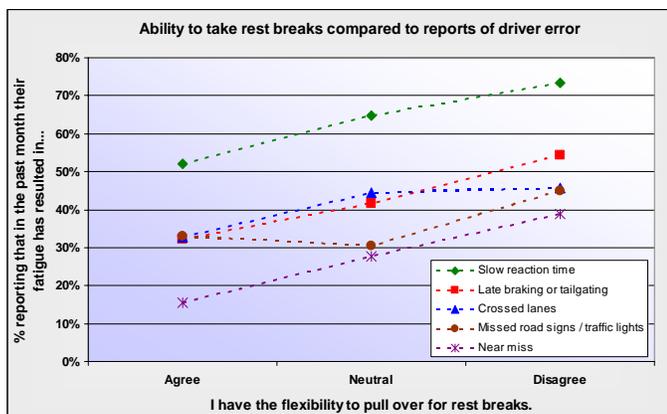
**Three out of every four truck drivers report that in the past month they have experienced at least one type of driving error as a result of their fatigue.**

Despite almost 70% of the respondents reporting that they were able to manage their fatigue, a significant majority of these drivers also reported experiencing fatigue-related driving errors within the previous month. The most common incidents cited were: slowed reaction time, late braking, and crossed lanes. An alarmingly high percentage of drivers also reported experiencing a near miss or running off the road.



**Truck drivers reporting that they do not have the flexibility to pull over for rest breaks were significantly more likely to report fatigue-related driving error.**

One in five drivers responded that they do not have the flexibility in their schedule to pull over for a short break when experiencing fatigue. These same drivers report a much higher incidence of fatigue-related driving error.



## **Knowledge of Fatigue**

**Only two out of every five drivers have received information on the effects of fatigue and strategies for dealing with it.**

Fewer than half of the respondents reported that they had received information about driver fatigue, yet almost all drivers suggested that they felt they recognized the symptoms of fatigue. Because of this, alternative approaches for educating drivers about fatigue will need to be investigated.

## **Causes of Fatigue**

The causes of fatigue most often cited included not enough sleep, long shifts, waiting to load or unload, and not enough rest breaks. Meanwhile, the most frequently reported causes of lack of sleep were extended work hours and work-related stress.

## **Strategies for Managing Fatigue**

Drivers were asked their strategies for dealing with fatigue. The most common responses included drinking caffeine, opening windows, and taking a nap.

## **Other Observations**

Many of the conclusions that can be drawn from the survey have been reported in other studies. For example, according to the survey results, drivers reporting that they drive at night or that their start time varies also reported a higher incidence of fatigue-related errors. This was expected given what is already known about the “internal clock,” the natural cycle of alertness and drowsiness over each 24-hour period (circadian rhythm).

While many drivers responded that they use caffeine to stay alert, a few even reported that they use drugs and medications. Interestingly, when drivers use these fatigue-management strategies, which are only temporarily effective, some driving errors appear to be more frequent.

There appear to be some differences between industries. Forestry-industry drivers were more likely to report that fatigue affected their safety and much less likely to agree that they had seen information on driver fatigue. Construction-industry drivers were much more likely to report that they were able to manage their fatigue.

## **Next Step**

The results of the truck-driver fatigue survey and the resulting feedback from the TruckSafe symposium have shown that fatigue is of concern to the trucking industry and warrants further attention. There is support from many agencies to bring this safety issue to the forefront.

The next step will be for WorkSafeBC to partner with other stakeholders to determine strategies for promoting an industry culture in which truck drivers are able to recognize and safely manage their fatigue.

*\*Note: This survey's results are considered accurate to within plus or minus five percent, 19 times out of 20.*