



NEW YORK, March 10, 2017 -- It marks the unofficial start of spring, as days get longer and we enjoy more sunlight. But daylight savings time, which begins this weekend, also brings an increased risk of drowsy driving, recognized by traffic safety experts as a significant factor in crashes nationwide.

The National Road Safety Foundation cautions drivers to be especially aware of driver fatigue as daylight savings begins. The time change can disrupt normal sleep patterns, increasing the possibility of drowsiness behind the wheel.

Drowsy driving results in more than 100,000 crashes every year, causing about 1,500 deaths, 71,000 injuries and more than \$30 billion in losses, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

"Drowsy driving can be as dangerous as drinking and driving," said Michelle Anderson of the National Road Safety Foundation, a non-profit organization that produces and distributes free driver safety materials. Studies show 60 percent of motorists have driven while fatigued and more than a third admit to having fallen asleep at the wheel.

The brain may compensate for fatigue by taking micro-sleeps for a few seconds or longer. During a three- or four-second micro-sleep, a car at highway speed can travel the length of a football field, veering out of its lane and into oncoming traffic or off the road and into a tree. Sleep-induced crashes are often very serious, since a dozing driver may not take evasive or corrective action as the vehicle leaves its lane. Drivers should recognize the signs of drowsiness:

- Difficulty focusing
- Frequent blinking
- Not remembering the last few miles driven
- Head nodding
- Repeated yawning or rubbing eyes
- Drifting out of lane, tailgating or going over rumble strips
- "Rolling down the windows or blasting the radio won't keep you awake if you are sleep-deprived," Anderson said. "Those tactics simply don't work."

A driver who experiences any of these warning signs should pull over at the next safe spot, take a break and, if possible, a 20-minute nap. Have a cup or two of coffee or a caffeinated snack and allow 30 minutes for the caffeine to enter the bloodstream. Don't drink alcohol or take medications, which can bring on drowsiness.

The National Road Safety Foundation, Inc. (NRSF), a 501 c 3 non-profit organization founded more than 50 years ago, produces traffic safety programs on distracted driving, speed and aggression, impaired driving, driver proficiency, pedestrian safety and a host of other safety issues. Its program "Recognizing the Drowsy Driver" deals with driver fatigue. NRSF distributes its programs free of charge to schools, police and traffic safety advocates, community groups and individuals. It also sponsors contests to engage teens in promoting safe driving to their peers and in their communities. For more information or to download free programs, visit www.nrsf.org or www.teenlane.org.