

ROLL CALL REMINDER:

DROWSY DRIVING

This Roll Call Reminder is intended to generate a dialogue between law enforcement supervisors and patrol officers while creating a framework for regular agenda items during staff meetings. Please note that the message contained here only aims to support the department's safe driving efforts and is not meant to replace current driver safety strategies.

Dear Department Leader,

The dangers associated with being a police officer, the need to maintain a constant state of vigilance and the fear of the unknown is enough to leave anyone tired and stressed out at the end of a patrol shift. These factors, coupled with rotating shifts and irregular working hours, make it easy to see how an officer can become exhausted. When an officer is unable to manage their fatigue, it leads to what the National Highway Transportation and Safety Administration (NHTSA) has termed "drowsy driving."

Drowsy driving is not just an officer falling asleep at the wheel. It is a profound impairment that mimics alcohol-impaired driving in many ways. Drowsiness leads to slower reaction time and impaired attention, mental processing, judgment and decision-making. Furthermore, drowsy driving increases the chances of an accident and increases an officer's susceptibility to illness and stress.

It is critical to understand the extent to which fatigue degrades officer driving performance and for officers to learn how to manage their fatigue effectively. What can your agency do to help manage officer fatigue and avoid drowsy driving? Here are some items to consider:

- The best countermeasure to drowsy driving is to get enough rest on a daily basis.
- Sleep is the only true preventative measure against the risks of drowsy driving.
- Make it a priority to get 7 to 8 hours of sleep per night.
- Regulate the number of hours officers may work.
- Implement wellness programs that encourage healthy sleeping patterns and stress reduction.

Understanding the impact of fatigue on an officer's performance, as well as ways officers and leaders can mitigate the risks associated with lack of sleep is significant for managing fatigue and reducing the risk of drowsy driving.

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This Roll Call Reminder discusses the hazards of drowsy driving. The intent is to have a department leader or designated team member read the reminder aloud to the team. After hearing the message, work together to answer and respond to the questions that follow. To conclude the conversation, it is important that you acknowledge the hazards you face when it comes to drowsy driving and commit to managing fatigue while on the job.

Welcome Law Enforcement Officers,

Are you weary after a twelve-hour rotating shift, only to hold over for a mandatory four-hour overtime assignment, with a possibility of an afternoon court appearance accompanied by endless hours spent waiting to testify and not to mention, trying to hold together a family or social life? Are you trying to fend off fatigue with coffee and high-energy drinks? Ultimately, the concern with fatigue is that you may end up impaired to the point that you can no longer perform your job safely.

Research shows that chronic sleep deprivation could affect a police officer's decision-making abilities and alertness, putting the officer at risk on the job (James, Samuels, & Vincent, 2018). Another study by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ, 2002) found that fatigue impaired four out of eight officers involved in on-the-job accidents and injuries; they had poor eye-hand coordination and some fell asleep while driving.

When you are tired or fatigued, you can become much more prone to making mistakes. When you make a mistake, you risk hurting not only yourself but fellow officers and members of the public as well.

- What work-related factors contribute most to your fatigue?
- How can fatigue affect your performance while on duty?
- What are some ways you can reduce fatigue?

The long-term effects of chronic fatigue can affect your performance while on duty. Poor fatigue management can lead to driving drowsy, which can result in sleep-related crashes. It is vital to get adequate sleep as often as possible. Work hard to manage your off-duty employment, overtime details and family activities. Notify your supervisor when you are extremely tired due to lack of rest and allow the supervisor to conduct an appropriate assessment of your ability to perform your job. You cannot serve your community effectively and return home to your loved ones safely if your cognitive skills and decision-making abilities are impaired, leading to an increased risk of accidents and an increased susceptibility to illness and stress.

REFERENCES

- James, L., Samuels, C.H., and Vincent, F. (2018). Evaluating the effectiveness of fatigue management training to improve police sleep health and wellness: A pilot study. *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, 60(1), 77-82. doi: 10.1097/JOM.0000000000001174
- Vila, B., and Kenney, D.J., (2002). Tired cops: The prevalence and potential consequences of police fatigue. *NIJ Journal*. Retrieved from: <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/jr000248d.pdf>