

Drowsy driving in the ridesharing industry is a public safety risk

April 16 2018



A position statement from the American Academy of Sleep Medicine (AASM) concludes that fatigue and sleepiness are inherent safety risks in the ridesharing industry. Credit: American Academy of Sleep Medicine

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Both sleep deprivation and circadian influences leave ridesharing [drivers](#) at risk for [drowsy driving](#). The typical schedule for workers in the ridesharing industry may lead to driving after extended periods of wakefulness or during nights. These drivers also are often independent contractors who are not screened for medical problems that can reduce alertness, such as [obstructive sleep apnea](#).

"We are dealing with a public safety issue, where low fares and salary incentives compel drivers to continue driving past their safety limits. They may be unaware of the huge risks they are taking or have the false belief that sleep is overrated. Their customers, meanwhile, usually aren't asking themselves, 'How alert is my driver right now?' They aren't even thinking about drowsy driving. This is a formula for disaster," said senior author Dr. Indira Gurubhagavatula, an associate professor of [medicine](#) in the Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. "We need to raise awareness and gather information. Without accurate estimates of how common this is, or regulation, it's the wild west of transportation out there."

The position statement is published in the April 15 issue of the *Journal of Clinical Sleep Medicine*.

The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety estimates that an average of 328,000 annual crashes in the U.S. [involve a drowsy driver](#), including 109,000 that result in injuries and 6,400 that involve a fatality. The National Transportation Safety Board also included "[reduce fatigue-related accidents](#)" on its 2017-2018 Most Wanted List of the 10 most critical changes needed to reduce transportation accidents and save lives.

In February, ridesharing company Uber [announced](#) that it is requiring drivers to go offline for six straight hours after a total of 12 hours of driving time. Similarly, Lyft [requires](#) its drivers to take a six-hour break for every 14 hours of driving. However, the AASM considers these limits to be insufficient since many ridesharing drivers work multiple jobs or drive for more than one ridesharing company, and they often drive late at night and early in the morning when sleepiness may peak.

"The American Academy of Sleep Medicine calls on ridesharing companies, government officials, medical professionals, and law enforcement officers to work together to address fatigue and sleepiness in the [ridesharing](#) industry," said AASM President Dr. Ilene Rosen. "A collaborative effort is necessary to reduce this public [safety](#) risk."

Visit the [Awake at the Wheel](#) campaign page for tips from the National Healthy Sleep Awareness Project to help you recognize the warning signs of drowsy driving.

More information: Michael Berneking et al, The Risk of Fatigue and Sleepiness in the Ridesharing Industry: An American Academy of Sleep Medicine Position Statement, *Journal of Clinical Sleep Medicine* (2018). [DOI: 10.5664/jcsm.7072](https://doi.org/10.5664/jcsm.7072)

Provided by American Academy of Sleep Medicine

Citation: Drowsy driving in the ridesharing industry is a public safety risk (2018, April 16) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-04-drowsy-ridesharing-industry-safety.html>

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