

PRESS RELEASE

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A scientific study reveals many long-haul truck drivers lack sleep

More than one out of four (28%) long-haul truck drivers sleep less than six hours before getting behind the wheel for a long trip. Nearly one out of three (30%) believe an accident can be caused by drowsiness. Also, three out of four (74%) say they have recently driven over the rumble strip along the emergency lane generally as a result of drowsiness or inattentiveness.

These are just some of the first results of an unprecedented scientific study about truck drivers' sleep by the Raymond-Poincaré Hospital in Garches, France, (a Paris Health Board hospital) as part of the scientific research programme run by the VINCI Autoroutes Foundation on preventing drowsiness and inattentiveness at the wheel.

The aim of this study is to gain a better understanding of truck drivers' sleeping habits, assess their risk of falling asleep at the wheel and identify the countermeasures they might adopt to combat drowsiness.

Significant sleep debt usually follows staying up late the night before setting off

- **28%** of the drivers questioned claim they sleep **less than six hours the night before setting off**.
- **During the working week, when their trip lasts several days**, their average sleep time tends to increase, as in this instance only **13% claim they sleep less than six hours a night**.

Dr Maria-Antonia Quera-Salva, who led the study, noted that contrary to common belief "truck drivers sleep more in their trucks than when they are at home. They therefore need to ensure they get enough sleep the days before setting out on a job so that they do not start their trip with a sleep deficit."

This recommendation is all the more important given that the study results show that drivers who slept less than six hours before setting off were **four times more likely than the other drivers in the study** to have experienced **a near-accident caused by drowsiness** during their work.

Many long-haul truck drivers are aware of their vulnerability to the risk of drowsiness

Nearly one out of three (30%) believe an accident can be caused by drowsiness. Among these, **more than half (59%) had experienced a near-accident caused by drowsiness** in the year leading up to the study (compared with just 35% of the drivers who do not believe they face any risk). The drivers most aware of the risk of drowsiness are also those who tend to take preventive measures: they take more frequent naps during their trips (75% compared with 59% for the other truck drivers) and they also drink more coffee, sometimes excessively (18% of them drink more than 10 cups a day compared with 9% of the other truck drivers).

Ineffective, even dangerous practices need to be avoided

The study results also show that taking breaks every two hours is not sufficiently widespread among truck drivers: for the trips covered by the survey, only 41% of drivers stop at least once for every two hours' driving time (and 77% at least once after four hours).

Furthermore, too many ineffective, even dangerous, countermeasures are used to prevent the risk of falling asleep at the wheel: 35% of drivers listen to the radio and 15% snack. **Even 12% use their telephone to prevent falling asleep at the wheel.** Also, 5% admit to deliberately using rumble strips as a guide. The study revealed that these warning systems are useful when used appropriately: many of the study's truck drivers reported having recently driven over the rumble strips (74%), two thirds of whom as a result of an episode of inattention or drowsiness; 81% stated that the rumble strips had then helped them get back properly into their traffic lane.

A healthy lifestyle and good habits help reduce driver drowsiness

The first step individuals can take to prevent the risk of drowsiness is to adopt a healthy lifestyle: "Don't deprive yourself of sleep (get at least seven hours sleep every night), limit your coffee consumption to four cups a day, eat a balanced diet, get regular exercise and refrain from smoking¹". These are Dr Quera-Salva's recommendations for promoting restorative sleep during rest periods.

As Bernadette Moreau, General Delegate at the VINCI Autoroutes Foundation for Responsible Driving, points out, "drivers must pay particular attention to the signs of drowsiness and stop as soon as they notice them, regardless of their worksheet commitments". She added, "Rumble strips are effective for warning drivers but they should never be used as a 'guide rail' causing drivers to encroach on the emergency lane. **Each year an average of five people, of whom one motorway employee, are killed by a vehicle driving in the emergency lane** which is strictly reserved for emergency crews and motorway services."

Method: a scientific study carried out directly on the motorway network

The study was led by doctors from the Sleep Unit at Raymond-Poincaré Hospital in Garches, France, (a Paris Health Board hospital), on a sample of 375 drivers on 15 November 2011, 18 April 2012, and 24 and 25 October 2012 between 4.00 pm and 11.00 pm, on the Roussillon (A7 motorway), Montélimar (A7 motorway), Limours (A10 motorway), Val Neuvy (A10 motorway), La Scoperta (A8 motorway) and Aire du Pôle 45 in Saran rest areas. Long-haul truck drivers were asked to answer the 30-minute scientific questionnaire anonymously. The questions covered their sleeping habits for the past year and the 48 hours prior to their current trip, as well as how they manage workplace fatigue.

About the VINCI Autoroutes Foundation for Responsible Driving

Created in February 2011, the VINCI Autoroutes Foundation for Responsible Driving is a laboratory, observatory and source of information specifically focused on improving road safety. It aims to help bring about changes in driver behavior and to encourage drivers to take responsibility of their own safety and that of other road users. Its actions include: information campaigns to raise awareness of road risks; funding for innovative scientific research in certain areas of risky driver behavior that have not been sufficiently explored or are poorly identified by road users; and finally to fund initiatives by non-profit organizations or citizen initiatives aimed at encouraging responsible driving.

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¹ More than 50% of truck drivers are smokers compared with 31% of the general male population (source: INEP-French Institute for educational studies), and almost 40% of the study sample are overweight (BMI – body mass index – of between 25 and 30) and 29% are obese (BMI above 30).