

***While drowsiness and fatigue when driving are responsible for 40% of traffic fatalities on France's highways<sup>1</sup>, drivers are losing the equivalent of one night of sleep per year.***

The VINCI Autoroutes Foundation for Responsible Driving unveiled the results of an extensive scientific investigation on drowsy driving, led by Raymond Poincaré Hospital (part of Assistance Publique - Hôpitaux de Paris) in Garches, France. Data was used to compile a snapshot of French drivers' sleep habits and establish a link to the risks of drowsy driving. The investigation also assessed the evolution of driver behaviour with regard to sleep since completion of a first study on the subject 15 years before.

**Sleep deficit has continued to widen since 1996**

The situation is alarming: in 15 years, drivers have lost an average of 20 minutes of sleep per night. This represents a cumulative sleep deficit of 7,300 minutes annually, **equivalent to 15 eight-hour nights**. The causes for this troubling reality are mainly a result of changing lifestyles: increasing commuting distances, proliferation of entertainment technology (computer screens, tablets, smartphones), etc. The doctors in charge of the survey believe that chronic sleep debt can have a significant impact on the daily lives of the French, including on their driving abilities. The results indicate that during the three months preceding the study, **18% of drivers experienced episodes of severe drowsiness at the wheel** that adversely affected their driving, **double the level of 15 years ago**.

Given this situation, the period when many people are departing for holidays can be an aggravating factor, due particularly to the time needed to prepare the trip or to night departures. Indeed, 31% of drivers lost at least one hour from their usual amount of sleep on the day of departure and of this number, **59% were unaware of the deprivation**. Occasional sleep loss adds to the accumulated debt of chronic sleep loss, multiplying the risk of drowsy driving and without recognition at all times by drivers of the extent of the risk.

**The direct influence of sleep debt on drowsy driving**

The effects of accumulated sleep debt are significant: the study shows that more than one in ten drivers experienced an episode of severe drowsiness during their trip. **In studying more closely the sleep patterns of these drowsy drivers, doctors found that their amount of sleep was consistently lower than that of non-drowsy drivers**, especially the night before leaving on vacation, during which they slept **an average of 37 minutes less** than the non-drowsy drivers.

Finally, the study's authors identified the prevalence of another risk factor for drowsy drivers. While French drivers are now twice as likely to avoid taking to the road at night (8.5% in 2011 compared with 17% in 1996), indicating a positive change in behaviour, the practice nonetheless remains more common among drowsy drivers: 16% took to the road between 10:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m.

<sup>1</sup> Source: ASFA 2012 figures

### **Good sleeping habits, a factor in road safety**

With the significant number of people who will be traveling by automobile during the upcoming Toussaint holiday, the VINCI Autoroutes Foundation is warning drivers of the need for healthy sleeping habits by following a few simple tips:

- have a full night's sleep prior to the day of departure,
- avoid departing at night (between 10:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m.),
- take regular breaks, at least every two hours, throughout the journey,
- stop at a rest area at the first sign of fatigue,
- don't hesitate to change drivers regularly.

### **Study methodology**

Funded by the VINCI Autoroutes Foundation and managed by the team of Dr. Maria Antonia Salva-Quera, neurologist and physician responsible for the sleep unit at Raymond Poincaré Hospital in Garches (AP-HP), the scientific investigation on drowsy driving looked at the sleeping and driving habits of 3,500 drivers. Conducted in July 2011 on the VINCI Autoroutes network during major holiday departures, it produced valuable information on French sleep habits, 15 years after a similar study was conducted in 1996 by the team of Professor Pierre Philip (CHU Bordeaux).

### **The VINCI Autoroutes Foundation for Responsible Driving**

Created in February 2011, the VINCI Autoroutes Foundation for Responsible Driving is a laboratory, an observatory and an information resource focusing on road safety. Its goal is to help change driver behaviour and to enable drivers to become proactive participants in ensuring their own safety. The Foundation's activities include awareness campaign; funding for innovative scientific research on a number of hazardous driving behaviours that have so far been insufficiently explored or are poorly identified by road users; and funding for initiatives by civic associations and groups aimed at fostering responsible driving.

<http://fondation.vinci-autoroutes.com/>

<http://roulons-autrement.com/>

### **Media Contacts:**

Estelle Ferron, tel. +33 1 55 94 70 18 / [estelle.ferron@vinci-autoroutes.com](mailto:estelle.ferron@vinci-autoroutes.com)

Raphaël Daniel, tel. +33 1 53 92 80 19 / [raphael.daniel@vae-solis.com](mailto:raphael.daniel@vae-solis.com)

Company foundation of VINCI Autoroutes for Responsible Driving  
1 cours Ferdinand de Lesseps - 92851 Rueil-Malmaison Cedex - France