

MEDIA RELEASE

Time Change and Road Safety

Burnaby, BC / October 26, 2009 – The end of daylight savings time brings with it changes in our sleep patterns and in our daily commutes. The clock says we gain an extra hour of sleep on Monday morning, but our bodies don't feel it. We also gain an extra hour of darkness at the end of the day and that requires us to be more alert during our commute home.

“Both of these things affect our ability to be safe drivers, pedestrians and cyclists,” says BCAA Traffic Safety Foundation’s executive director, Allan Lamb. “The first work day of the time change people are generally groggy and with the darker afternoons at the end of the day, it can be a dangerous combination.”

Time changes reflect a change in social clocks not biological ones and studies are showing that we don't actually adjust to these time changes so easily. Our circadian rhythms (body clocks) are not good at adjusting to the time change naturally.

A groggy driver is a dangerous driver. Fatigue can impair the brain functions as much as alcohol, reducing the mind and body’s ability to respond quickly and accurately in emergency situations.

Sleep related collisions are very common and range from hitting a pedestrian in an intersection, to rear-ending the vehicle in front or you, to veering off of the road and hitting a parked car or a telephone pole.

“Multi-tasking only increases the possibility of driver error and a possible crash,” adds Lamb who suggests that now is a good time to start the practice of not using your cell phone or checking your e-mails until you get to where you are going, in light of the anticipated legislation banning the use of hand-held electronic devices while driving.

Sleep is what your body really needs to be able to function properly. The BCAA Traffic Safety Foundation recommends changing your sleeping patterns before the time change takes effect to allow your body to adjust and avoid caffeine or other substances to “wake you up”.

Various studies indicate that the lack of daylight during the evening commute home often results in an increased number of traffic related deaths and serious injuries. According to the 2007 BC Traffic Collision Statistics report most injury collisions happen between the 3 pm and 7 pm. (TCS 2007 Report Table 2.03 page 9)

Of all contributing factors assigned to collisions during 2007, 79.2% involved human action or condition. Driver inattentive (34.3%), driver error/confusion (20.6%), and speed (19.9%) were three of the most common factors. (TCS 2007 Report Sec 3, page 11)

This fall practice caution during your commute home at the end of the day.

A few tips to help prevent crashes and injuries.

For Drivers –

- Turn on your headlights - most daytime-running light systems don't automatically illuminate the taillights.
- Inspect headlights, taillights and signal lights regularly - clean, replace and re-align as needed.
- Change windshield wiper blades before their effectiveness is reduced - it's impossible to avoid crashes if you can't see the road clearly.
- Defrost windows – check that your vehicle's air circulation system is functioning properly to quickly defrost or defog windows. Keep a combination snowbrush / squeegee / scraper handy to ensure windows are free of dew and frost before setting out.
- Slow down – give yourself more time to react to a situation by driving 10 km slower. The faster you travel the longer it will take to stop and the faster your response must be.
- Slippery road surfaces - slippery leaves can be just as treacherous as patches of ice. Fallen leaves retain large amounts of water and can create a slippery surface. Drive slowly through them and avoid hard or panic braking.
- Slow down when it's raining - when roads are slick with water, vehicles are susceptible to hydroplaning and take longer to stop. Oil tends to rise to the surface with the first rain after a prolonged dry spell.

For Pedestrians –

- Clothing - wear light or reflective clothing to make you more visible in dark conditions. Carrying a flash light will also make you more visible and help you see your way in the dark.
- Always cross at a designated intersection, looking both ways and make sure drivers see you before you cross. Never step out from between parked cars.
- If there is no sidewalk, always walk facing traffic and as far off the road as possible.
- Plan the walking portion of your commute along well-lit streets.

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About BCAA Traffic Safety Foundation

The BCAA Traffic Safety Foundation is a non-profit registered charity working with families, communities and business partners to reduce the number and severity of traffic crashes and injuries in B.C. For more information visit www.BCAATSF.ca or call 604-298-5107.

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