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Drowsy Driving Dangers Missing From States' Rules of the Road

National Sleep Foundation's "State of the States" Report Finds Drowsy Driving Hazards to be Under-Recognized and Underreported

WASHINGTON, DC, November 10, 2008 – Drowsy driving related motor-vehicle crashes are a serious threat to American travelers. To shed light on this issue, the National Sleep Foundation (NSF) is releasing the results of a new survey that demonstrates that inadequate police officer training, a lack of accurate educational materials, and sparse data collection are preventing greater understanding of the impact drowsy driving has on communities across the nation.

For the first time, NSF rated all states and the District of Columbia based on responses to several questions related to law enforcement, police training, data collection, educational efforts, and existing graduated licensing laws for new drivers. The state of Mississippi received the highest grade (B-), with the majority of states receiving a grade of "C".

NSF's *State of the States Report on Drowsy Driving* found that:

- Only 13 states and the District of Columbia provide police training about the effects of fatigue on driving performance (AK, AZ, FL, GA, ID, MD, MA, MS, MT, NC, OH, WA, WY), with an additional five states providing only limited or sporadic training on the issue (AR, KY, MI, SC, NE).
- Only one state, New Jersey, has a specific law for fall-asleep crashes involving a fatality (Maggie's Law). However, all but two states (Iowa and Maine) said that they could charge a drowsy driver for causing a fatality under existing laws. The states of Hawaii and Texas did not respond to the survey.
- Only 17 states mandate that drowsy driving information be included in driver education curricula.
- While 43 states provide some information in their driver license manuals, several states perpetuate myths about unproven "countermeasures" such as turning up the radio or rolling down the window.
- An overwhelming majority (45) of states and D.C. have graduated licensing systems for young people that incorporate a nighttime driving

restriction. Seven states have nighttime restrictions starting at 10:00 p.m. as recommended by NSF and other traffic safety organizations.

“States across the nation seem to be trying to increase their efforts to combat drowsy driving, especially in the area of graduated licensing laws for young drivers,” said NSF CEO David Cloud. “However, due to a lack of awareness of the serious repercussions of drowsy driving and a lack of accurate reporting, state officials don’t have the data they need to support increased efforts to aggressively address driver fatigue. Drivers, parents, educators, employers and government officials alike need to start taking drowsy driving more seriously.”

NSF’s *State of the States Report* is based on a national survey of traffic safety offices and additional research conducted by NSF. The 2008 report is an update from previous reports issued in 2007 and 1998.

A model for the nation, New Jersey continues to be the only state with a specific law for fall-asleep crashes. New Jersey explicitly defines drowsy driving as recklessness under a vehicular homicide statute. Known as "Maggie's Law," New Jersey's statute has served to raise awareness of the consequences of sleep deprivation and has spurred significant action in other states. There are now at least 9 states with 16 pending bills that address fatigued driving in various ways.

Though some states are taking steps to get drowsy drivers off the road, many Americans are still unaware of the serious effect sleepiness has on driving performance. In fact, NSF’s 2008 *Sleep in America Poll* found that 32% of working Americans report driving drowsy at least once in the past month.

In order to address the lack of education about drowsy driving, NSF is continuing its Drowsy Driving Prevention Week™ (DDPW) campaign. This effort seeks to raise public awareness and increase advocacy around drowsy driving. The focus of this year’s campaign is on special at-risk groups including young drivers, working adults, commercial drivers and people with untreated sleep disorders.

On DDPW’s Web site, www.drowsydriving.org, individuals can find information about drowsy driving as well as an easy-to-use toolkit to help them spread the word about this issue. The site also features a memorials and testimonials page that tells the stories of those whose lives have been permanently affected by drowsy driving and preserves the memory of those whose lives were lost. The complete *State of the States Report on Drowsy Driving* is available at www.DrowsyDriving.org/stateofthestatesreport.

NSF has enlisted the following group of prominent and diverse partners to support DDPW and to help raise awareness of the consequences of drowsy driving among their members and the public:

Partners for Drowsy Driving Prevention Week 2008

Board of Registered Polysomnographic Technologists
National Sleep Awareness Roundtable
National Organizations for Youth Safety
Students Against Destructive Decisions

About NSF

The National Sleep Foundation (NSF) is an independent nonprofit organization dedicated to improving public health and safety by achieving greater understanding of sleep and sleep disorders. NSF furthers its mission through sleep-related education, research and advocacy initiatives. NSF's membership includes researchers and clinicians focused on sleep medicine as well as other professionals in the health, medical and science fields, individuals, patients and more than 800 sleep clinics and dentists throughout North America that join the Foundation's Sleep Care Centers program. For more information, visit, www.sleepfoundation.org.