‘Driver fatigue’ public education campaign 2009/2010

Campaign overview
Fatigue is a silent killer that creeps up on all motorists no matter their age, the time of day or whether it is on a short or long trip. Statistics show that fatigue contributed to 44 deaths on Queensland roads in 2008 which was approximately 13% of the total road toll.

The 2009-10 fatigue public education campaign developed and implemented by the Department of Transport and Main Roads urges all Queensland motorists to wake up to the warning signs of fatigue, which include yawning, heavy eyes, blurred vision and reduced concentration and swap drivers or pull over to a safe place to rest and avoid continuing to drive tired.

The campaign launched in September 2009 and will run again from December 2009 to January 2010.

Campaign background
Market research has revealed driver fatigue is not seen as a ‘big killer’ on the road by some but it can happen to anyone anytime on both long and short trips. It is as dangerous as speeding and drink driving. For example, getting behind the wheel after 17 hours without sleep has the same effect on a person’s driving as having a blood alcohol level of 0.05 (Transport Accident Commission, Victoria, 2009).

Community attitudes and awareness
A study undertaken by Nordbakke and Sagberg (2007)* found that drivers generally had a good knowledge of factors influencing the risk of falling asleep and preventative measures that they should undertake when feeling fatigued.

Despite this knowledge, drivers continued to drive even after recognising that they were fatigued. Reasons that were given for commencing or continuing to drive tired included:

• it was only a short trip
• needed to get to an appointment
• would be arriving at their destination sooner
• needed to get back at a reasonable hour
• needed to get back for work quickly
• they would be alright once they started to drive.

The fatigue campaign is designed to address community attitudes in order to encourage attitudinal and behavioural change.

Campaign objectives
The campaign urges motorists to be alert to the signs of fatigue and communicate to drivers that, the same reasons motivating them to keep driving, like getting home to loved ones, are the very reasons they should stop and rest.

* ‘Sleepy at the wheel: Knowledge, symptoms and behaviour among car drivers’ Authors: Susanne Nordbakke, Fridulv Sagberg
Key messages

Primary message:
• Wake up to the signs of driver fatigue.

Secondary messages:
• take a 15 minute break every two hours
• watch for the early warning signs of fatigue including:
  o sore or heavy eyes
  o dim or fuzzy vision
  o hallucinations
  o droning and humming in ears
  o general tiredness
  o stiffness and cramps
  o aches and pains
  o day dreaming
  o delayed reaction times
  o unintentional increases or decreases in speed
  o fumbling for gear changes
  o car wandering across the road.
• swap drivers or take a break from driving if you experience any symptoms
• avoid driving tired for the sake of your loved ones and Be Here for Life.

Target audiences

Motorists most at risk of this kind of crash are those who are sleep deprived, drive long distances without rest breaks, drive at times when they are normally asleep, have sleep disorders, become drowsy after taking medication, are intoxicated, are driving alone or are driving on a rural road.

Although driving while fatigued is often associated with long distance travel and long distance truck drivers, the majority of vehicles involved in fatigue related crashes are passenger vehicles.

Campaign strategy

A key long-term objective for fatigue public education is to position driving tired as a serious road safety issue, as socially irresponsible, as dangerous as speeding and drink driving, and as a major contributor to the road toll by the general driving community.

Campaign elements

The current campaign ‘Wake up to the signs of driver fatigue’ includes a 30 and 15 second television ads, outdoor billboards and a 45 second radio advertisement, and publicity activities.

Television

Two television commercials comprise of a 15 second commercial for airing in Brisbane metropolitan areas outlining the symptoms and instructions for addressing driver fatigue (due to market research finding with the target audience in this geographic area) and a 30 second commercial that provides symptoms, instructions and the emotional reasons to avoid driving tired (to be here for the ones you love), which will be aired in metropolitan and regional locations.
Radio
The 45 second radio ad ‘Roadworthy’ provides an in-vehicle reminder of the signs of fatigue and techniques to avoid driving tired at key risk times (for example, evenings).

Outdoor
Targeted outdoor billboards provide an in-vehicle reminder to motorists to heed the warning signs of fatigue and to take steps to avoid driving tired.

Billboard placement targets fatigue crash zones on regional roads and will also target south east Queensland motorists in urban areas. Driver fatigue-related crashes can occur on long or short trips in both urban and regional areas.

Publicity
A proactive media strategy is also being used to support the campaign. Media releases will be distributed to Queensland media in advance of key holiday periods to promote the dangers of fatigue, the need to take regular rest breaks and use operating Driver Reviver sites.

The department also produces a weekly online news broadcast called Road Sense which is distributed to all media throughout Queensland and features articles on the dangers of driver fatigue.

There is also a monthly advertorial produced by the department called Shifting gears which appears in nineteen major regional newspapers and also features fatigue-related articles.

Previous campaigns
Over the past few years, the primary media for fatigue messages has been through the placement of outdoor billboards in high fatigue crash zones. The previous campaign ‘Rest or R.I.P.’ launched in 2002 in Queensland included outdoor billboards and truck back advertising in fatigue blackspot locations using the ‘Rest or RIP’ message and an image of a pillow. The campaign appeared across the state between July 2007 and June 2008.

The department also aired the ‘Microsleeps’ television commercial featuring Dr Karl Kruszelnicki. The ad features Dr Karl discussing the signs of fatigue and explaining the scientific notion of microsleeps. This commercial was first launched in December 2004.

Previous fatigue campaigns since the late 1990s have included:

- inclusion of fatigue road safety messages in the department’s ‘Fatal 4’ mass media campaign
- outdoor billboards, and radio commercials to provide an in-vehicle reminder to motorists
- print community service announcements distributed to newspapers across the state
- kits distributed to tourism and hire car operators containing a litter bag, video and brochure
- extensive publicity.
Previous campaign key messages have included:

- Don’t roll over in your sleep
- Rest or RIP
- Fatigue is a silent killer
- Fatigue creeps up on you
- Take a 15 minute break every 2 hours
- Don’t drive more than 10 hours in a day
- The signs of fatigue include feeling yawning, heavy eyes, blurred vision and reduced concentration
- Myths to combating fatigue include having a cup of coffee, tea or cola, winding down the window, turning up the air-conditioning or the radio.

An informational campaign was also conducted in 2007-08 to raise awareness among heavy vehicle drivers of their requirements under the National Heavy Vehicle Fatigue Program.

- A total of 97% of respondents recalled one or more main messages of the campaign when promoted. This included:
  - “Rest or RIP”
  - “Fatigue can cause microsleeps that result in a crash”.
- 98% of respondents said the campaign messages were easy to understand.

**Previous campaign outcomes and evaluation**

The department regularly conducts quantitative market research using a telephone survey of 400 motorists to assess attitudes and behaviours towards current road safety issues. Findings from the most recent research study undertaken in June 2009 revealed:

- Nearly seven in 10 respondents (68%) said they were aware of some aspect of the fatigue ‘Rest or RIP’ campaign with billboards performing the most strongly with 47% awareness.
- Almost three in ten respondents (or 27%) said they had discussed the road safety issue of fatigue with family and friends.