

Overweight drivers at risk of accidents

Obese drivers are more at risk of nodding off at the wheel because of a condition called sleep apnoea which can leave them desperate to catch up on lost sleeping hours.

One in five adults in England are considered to be obese, Dr David Dawson told the Federation/ACPO Roads Policing Conference, adding the UK is seeing a “sleep apnoea epidemic” connected to the obesity epidemic.

Dr Dawson, a consultant anaesthetist at Bradford Teaching Hospital’s NHS Trust, said the condition means the throat passage is narrowed as weight puts on the pressure and the muscles struggle to keep the airway open.

He wants to see those at risk being screened for the condition as they can cause more accidents on the roads.

Dr Dawson added that some HGV companies do get drivers checked. A study of 371 HGV drivers in 2005 found around 20 per cent of them had sleep apnoea.

He added that around 40 percent of the adult male population snore due to a number of factors, including the throat being narrowed, but that in sleep apnoea cases the impact can be catastrophic.

Delegates heard how those with sleep apnoea could never have a proper deep sleep as once they did, the muscles would relax too much and no air can get to the lungs. Although the brain wakes the person up into a lighter sleep, this pattern can be repeated throughout the night disturbing the deep sleep that makes us feel refreshed.

Dr Dawson said he had seen one case where a sales representative had to stop at every service station on the way to an appointment and would open his window on the motorway and drink Red bull to try to stay awake until he was diagnosed with sleep apnoea and treated.

Treatment for the condition consists of a box with a mask attached which is kept at the side of the bed and forces oxygen through the throat and effectively ‘splints open’ the throat passage, having a dramatic effect on those who use it.

Cash-strapped motorists beware

Cash-strapped motorists with uninsured cars will face tougher penalties – even if it is not being used and is parked in a private drive but not officially registered as off the road.

Ashton West, chief executive of the Motor Insurers’ Bureau (MIB) said from next year if motorists are the registered keeper of an uninsured vehicle the DVLA will have new powers to issue a fixed penalty notice of £100.

Motorists who have their car on their own drives or garages will only be able to avoid the fines if they have filled out a Statutory Off Road Notification which is sent to the DVLA.

Drivers who leave cars on a public road can have their vehicles clamped, seized and even crushed, irrespective of whether they have a valid tax disc.

The MIB has already launched a Stay Insured campaign which is aimed at targeting drivers who may be thinking about not renewing their car insurance as people are looking at ways to save money during the recession.

According to the MIB around 900,000 drivers under the age of 30 are driving without insurance.

Mr West said that recession has added to the numbers of people thinking about scrimping on their car insurance, adding that one in 14 drivers are aware of all the consequences of being caught without insurance.

Roads policing officers heard how 160 deaths a year are caused by uninsured drivers and they are responsible for 23,000 injuries a year.

The MIB, which compensates victims of uninsured drivers and families of victims, holds the motor insurance database which police officers can access and currently seize around 500 vehicles a day.

Weighty issue: being big can cause sleep apnoea



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Uninsured drivers will get fixed penalty notices



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