

END DRIVER FATIGUE IN COMMERCIAL ROAD TRANSPORT

EU policy makers, ACT NOW!



ETF research on driver fatigue uncovers irrefutable hard evidence requiring urgent action

A major survey among bus, coach and truck drivers reveals an urgent need for policy measures to tackle what is already a 'chronic disease' in Europe's commercial road transport. Approximately 2,800 professional drivers from across Europe responded to a survey launched by the European Transport Workers' Federation (ETF) in May 2020, tapping into drivers' direct experiences, and their views on the causes of fatigue, its consequences and the most effective countermeasures.

■ ***"I always feel tired."***
■ — Polish truck driver

The survey included interviews with six academics working in the field of fatigue, nine trade union representatives, eleven truck drivers, ten coach and bus drivers, and a law enforcement representative, as well as an extensive literature review.

Previous research into driver fatigue has failed to highlight the real cause: poor working conditions. The main focus has typically been on the quantity and quality of sleep, with secondary consideration of task-related

factors, such as monotony and time-on-task. By contrast, the role of employment and working conditions has been given little attention.

■ ***"In the nine hours of rest, I have to clean the bus, get home etc ... I only get four to five hours of sleep."***
■ — Dutch bus/coach driver

Results of the ETF survey show very clearly that both inadequate sleep and task-related causes of fatigue are intrinsically linked to the precarious working conditions and the low level of work organisation in the road transport sector. It is quite common for professional drivers to be informed of their next assignment only a few hours in advance, if at all. Irregular working schedules also take their toll, as they go against the fixed programming of the human body clock. Long commuting times will impinge on sleep too. Poor quality rest conditions – rest in the cab in particular – pressure to deliver faster and more cheaply, and driver tracking and tracing systems through which companies seek to increase driver efficiency, are also aspects of job precarity that clearly lead to fatigue.

LEADING CAUSES OF DRIVER FATIGUE

Percentage of ETF survey respondents rating each cause as "important" or "very important"

IN FREIGHT TRANSPORT

● Lack of rest areas	83%
● Poor quality of sleep	83%
● Poor overall health/fitness	82%
● General exhaustion	81%
● Not enough time to sleep	80%
● Interrupted sleep	80%
● Series of long working days without days off	80%
● Work pressure	79%
● Tight schedule/scheduling demands	78%
● Not enough time to rest	75%
● Sleep disorders	75%
● Long working hours	74%

IN BUS AND COACH TRANSPORT

● Series of long working days without days off	86%
● General exhaustion	86%
● Not enough time to sleep	85%
● Poor overall health/fitness	84%
● Not enough time to rest	84%
● Tight schedule/scheduling demands	83%
● Poor quality of sleep	83%
● Interrupted sleep	79%
● Extreme temperatures	78%
● Work pressure	78%
● Sleep disorders	77%
● Long working hours	76%

What about road safety?

"I'm driving a weapon: 40 tonnes at 80 kph."

— German truck driver

"It's not a bale of hay you are transporting; it's people. One or two more accidents due to fatigue are one or two too many."

— Belgian bus driver

Daily, we share roads with millions of commercial heavy-duty vehicles. Studies analysing fatigue as a cause of accidents rely on self-reporting, police data in crash reports and in-depth accident investigations. However, fatigue-related accidents are hard to identify, as fatigue is difficult to discern externally. Another problem is that drivers may not admit to driving while fatigued. This makes the accurate profiling of accidents caused by fatigue difficult. For these reasons, we assume that the number of accidents caused by fatigue is much higher than the statistics indicate.

Countermeasures against fatigue

Understanding the real causes of fatigue is crucial for effectively counteracting it. The ETF findings in this respect make it clear that fatigue cannot be overcome by motivation,

KEY FATIGUE PREVENTION MEASURES

- Improve rest facilities.
- Improve road infrastructure.
- Increase employers' awareness of the consequences of road fatigue.
- Enforce the law consistently.
- Enact stricter laws on driving and rest time.
- Institute reasonable work schedules that avoid or limit:
 - night driving
 - compressed or irregular work schedules
 - short daily rest periods
 - short notice of shifts.

training or willpower. Self-administrated countermeasures such as listening to the radio, drinking coffee, snacking, opening the window or ventilation underestimate the gravity of the real issue. Drivers' interviews revealed that the most effective countermeasure against fatigue is adequate sleep.

"There is no example of good practice in the sector. I think it is the only industry that doesn't have a program for the problem and that has to do with the fact that the customers and the bosses don't care."

— Belgian truck driver

Drivers made clear in the survey interviews that while a quick nap may be better than nothing, it is not an adequate solution to the problem of fatigue. Moreover, work pressures and tight schedules, as well as the poor conditions in parking areas, often make stops for a quick nap impossible.

"I spend one hour looking for a parking space... parking spaces face out to the motorway with no noise protection. It is much too loud."

— Austrian truck driver

Another key measure in fighting fatigue is the enforcement of the current EU rules and regulations through inspections and sanctions. Interviewees pointed to pressure and instructions to ignore the rules, especially in respect of driving times and breaks.

"I can't remember the last time I was inspected."

— Portuguese truck driver

Many truck drivers anecdotally revealed that they had not been inspected in years. Inspections are vital. However, sanctions must be targeted at those who are truly responsible for the infringements. The drivers interviewed justly pointed out that, although it is employers, dispatchers and clients who are at fault, it is the drivers who are sanctioned.

ETF is organising two workshops on driver fatigue in November and December 2020, at which the sensitive question of falling asleep at the wheel will be among the topics discussed.

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The ETF survey was analysed by Katrin Vitols and Eckhard Voss, *wmp consult*

A full report will be published online in June 2021. For further details, follow us through the social media or web links below.



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