

Delaware General Health District

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NEWS RELEASE

DROWSY DRIVING SUSPECTED IN LONE LOCAL HIGHWAY DEATH IN JUNE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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DELAWARE, Oh., July 9, 2009 – The Delaware General Health District’s Delaware County Safe Communities Program reports that there was one local traffic fatality in June. Drowsy driving is suspected.

The victim, a 22-year-old woman, lost her life at 1:33 a.m. on June 27. Her car went off U.S. 23 near Coover Road, struck a tree, and caught fire. Ohio Highway Patrol Troopers suspect the woman fell asleep at the wheel.

“Drowsy driving” is probably underreported as a cause for thousands of highway crashes, injuries, and deaths each year. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) and the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute reached that conclusion after a year-long study that used onboard video cameras and sensors to monitor 241 drivers as they traveled more than 2 million miles.

More than half of American drivers admit they have driven while drowsy, according to annual polls taken by the National Sleep Foundation. Nearly two out of five drivers say they have fallen asleep at the wheel within the past year.

Another report from experts at NHTSA and the National Center for Sleep Disorders Research characterized common factors in drowsy-driving crashes. The local June 27 crash had every factor: A lone driver going off a high-speed road late at night, with no evidence of any attempt to avoid a serious crash.

Three groups are most susceptible to driving drowsy, according to that joint study:

- Young people (ages 16 to 29), especially males.
- People whose sleep is disrupted by working at night or working long or irregular hours.
- People with untreated sleep apnea syndrome (SAS) and narcolepsy.

That study recommends these steps to avoid drowsy driving:

- Plan to get enough sleep.
- Don't drink alcohol when you are sleepy – not even a small amount.
- Limit driving between midnight and 6 a.m.

It further recommends that anyone who becomes drowsy while driving should stop immediately and either get some sleep or let someone else drive. Taking a 15- to 20-minute nap and/or consuming caffeine equivalent to two cups of coffee can improve alertness in the short term.

Highway Safety and Public Health advocates recommend focusing drowsy-driver education efforts toward young male drivers and shift workers susceptible to interrupted sleep patterns. An engineering aid is also designed to help: Those rumble strip indentations that now line the edges of many busy highways.

For additional safe driving tips, visit the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration at <http://nhtsa.gov> .

The Safe Communities program was developed through the Ohio Department of Public Safety to encourage community safety partnerships throughout Ohio.