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RAC and RHA in joint call for driver safety

Industry partnership group calls for fast track diagnosis for sleep conditions

Driving with an undiagnosed sleep condition is more dangerous than drink driving, according to leading players in the motoring sector, which have joined forces to raise awareness of the problem among employers of commercial vehicle drivers.

With the Christmas party season in full swing, police forces across the country are rightly focussing on making sure people don't drive home after drinking alcohol.

However, research released this month* has shown that driving with conditions such as obstructive sleep apnoea syndrome (OSAS) can be more of an impairment than having too much to drink.

Now, the RAC and Road Haulage Association (RHA) are backing calls for a fast track diagnostic and treatment pathway, for people suspected of having the condition who drive for a living because, if left untreated, these drivers pose a real threat to themselves and other road users.

Typically an OSAS sufferer will not always be aware that they have the condition so may not spot the warning signs, but will feel drowsy during the daytime and are more prone to fall asleep at the wheel when driving. Research in both the US and the UK** has demonstrated that the condition impairs driving to a greater degree than blood alcohol levels at the legal limit.

While the condition can affect anybody, the industry partnership is focussing on commercial drivers as accidents involving trucks and HGVs can have the most devastating impact, and employers can play an active role in ensuring their drivers are safe behind the wheel.

The Obstructive Sleep Apnoea Partnership Group, which includes the RAC and RHA, is calling for a four week waiting limit from diagnosis to treatment. Currently drivers can wait months for treatment which means they may lose their jobs, and as a result many people may not be coming forward to test for the condition.

The 'Four Week Wait' campaign was launched in March 2015 with the aim of persuading the Department of Health to implement the time limit, while calling on ministers/NICE to give the issue the priority it deserves so that the industry can move forward.

Professor John Stradling who was involved in the UK research study and is also a member of the OSA Partnership Group, said: "It is worth reminding anyone who considers driving with untreated OSAS, that the impairment to driving can be considerably greater than getting behind the wheel of a vehicle knowing due to exceeding the legal alcohol limit.

"There is a high risk of drivers with untreated OSAS losing concentration and

falling asleep behind the wheel, leading to injury or death. There is a fully effective treatment available, so it is not worth the risk to the driver or other road users, thus we are asking employers to support their drivers and encourage them to come forward if they have concerns."

RAC roads policy spokesperson, Nicholas Lyes, said: "Commercial drivers are vital to the health and growth of the UK's economy, so it's only right that those behind the wheel are safe and aware of any health threats that might impair their driving ability.

"HGV drivers are among the most highly trained and skilled on the roads, but something like obstructive sleep apnoea can affect anybody, regardless of ability and experience, which is why we feel it is vital that they have access to a fast track diagnosis and treatment that ensures job security and they are back on the road within a few weeks."

RHA deputy policy director, Colin Snape, urges employers to be aware of the danger signs and to highlight the issue to their drivers.

He said: "Drivers need to have confidence that if they come forward they will get treatment quickly, so that they can return to driving in no more than four weeks.

"The 'Four Week Wait' campaign sets out the standard that NICE needs to adopt if the transport community is to tackle this important road safety issue effectively."

ENDS

Notes to Editors

* Acute Sleep Deprivation and Risk of Motor Vehicle Crash Involvement, AAA Foundation, December 2016 - <http://publicaffairsresources.aaa.biz/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Acute-Sleep-Deprivation-and-Risk-of-Motor-Vehicle-Crash-Involvement.pdf>

** The UK 2001 study compared the effects of OSA versus sleep deprivation

versus alcohol (at roughly legal limit) on simulated driving performance. OSA impaired driving more than alcohol, and a whole night of sleep deprivation was slightly worse. So it is fair to say that OSA impairs simulated driving to a greater degree than at blood alcohol levels around the legal limit.

About the RAC

With more than eight million members, the RAC is one of the UK's most progressive motoring organisations, providing services for both private and business motorists. Whether it's roadside assistance, insurance, buying a used car, vehicle inspections and checks, legal services or up-to-the-minute traffic and travel information – the RAC offers a solution for all motoring needs. The RAC is committed to making motoring easier, safer, more affordable and more enjoyable for drivers and road users.

The RAC is the motorist's champion and campaigns to support the interests of its members and UK motorists at a national level, including advancing levels of road safety, supporting the needs of young drivers and voicing concerns about the increasing cost of motoring. The RAC's annual [Report on Motoring](#) – first published in 1989 – provides a clear insight into the concerns and issues facing today's motorists.

For the very latest news on UK fuel prices, check [RAC Fuel Watch](#) or follow [#racfuelwatch on Twitter](#). This is a comprehensive guide to the latest UK unleaded petrol and diesel prices – both at the wholesale level and at the pump. RAC Fuel Watch analyses how prices changed through the previous month and compares the most recent prices with those from three, six and 12 months before.

Key facts:

- RAC patrols fix four out of five vehicles at the roadside and on average within 30 minutes
- RAC vans carry more than 500 parts and tools to get members' vehicles going again
- 92% of members would recommend RAC Rescue to their friends and family

Contacts



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