

Road Traffic Collision - The Incident

An employee of GTCUC suffered minor injuries on 8th December 2020 when at approximately 08:00 hours they lost control of their vehicle causing it to leave the road and collided with a tree. The driver was taken to hospital as a precautionary measure.

The initial investigation has established that the driver may have been driving whilst tired due to a restless and disturbed sleep the night before. They also stated that they were in a hurry leaving for work as they had overslept and felt tired whilst driving. They considered pulling over but didn't want to be late for work. The incident occurred approximately 70 minutes after leaving the house.

Driver Fatigue – A quarter of all crashes on Britain's main roads causing death or serious injury are tiredness-related. Motorways and dual carriageways are particularly high-risk and it's also estimated that almost one in five crashes on trunk roads are fatigue-related.



Crashes caused by drivers falling asleep typically involve vehicles running off the road or into the back of another vehicle. They tend to be high-speed crashes, because drivers do not brake before crashing, so the risk of death or serious injury is high. Even if tired drivers don't fall asleep, they still pose a danger. Too little sleep radically affects your ability to drive safely, increasing reaction times, reducing attention, and reducing your ability to control the vehicle.

Who is at risk? All drivers are at risk, but male drivers, especially those under 30 years of age, are more likely to crash due to tiredness than female drivers: 85% of sleep-related crashes involve male drivers.

What can increase the risk of driving tired? Many factors can contribute to driver tiredness and increase your risk of being involved in a tiredness-related crash.

- **Time of day:** The most common times for drivers with normal sleep patterns to fall asleep at the wheel are early morning (02:00-06:00) and early afternoon (14:00-16:00). This is when the body clock reaches a natural dip, making you sleepy
- **Stress:** Tiredness and difficulty concentrating are typical symptoms of stress
- **Lack of sleep or disturbed sleep:** This could be due to disruptions in life such as a new baby, busy schedules or stress, or could be due to sleep disorders such as insomnia or sleep apnoea
- **Driving for long periods:** Research has found that driving deteriorates after two hours of continuous driving, as you become less able to concentrate, and slower to react to hazards
- **Vehicle engineering:** Modern vehicles are usually quiet and comfortable for the driver, meaning you might be more relaxed when driving. This can increase the lulling effect particularly in vehicles fitted with features such as cruise control
- **Medication:** Some prescription and over-the-counter drugs can affect driving by causing drowsiness and impaired alertness. Drivers should always check with their doctor or pharmacist if any medication they take can impair driving

How can I tell if I'm in danger of falling asleep at the wheel?

Warning signs include: increased difficulty concentrating; yawning; heavy eyelids; eyes starting to 'roll'; and neck muscles relaxing, making the head droop (head nodding).

How can I avoid driving tired?

The best way to avoid driving tired is to make sure you get plenty of rest beforehand, particularly if you are setting off early: at least 7 to 8 hours is recommended. Research shows that if you drive on less than 5 hours you only have a 1 in 10 chance of staying awake on a long journey.

Key Messages

- Plan your journey beforehand
- Never set off on a journey if you're already feeling tired
- Take breaks of at least 15 minutes at least every 2 hours
- Never try to fight off tiredness (stop somewhere safe and take a short nap (15 mins))
- Coffee or caffeinated drinks are effective for short periods (have the drink before your nap)

However, drinks and naps are a short-term solution, and cannot replace regular breaks and sufficient sleep. Therefore, drivers who still feel tired or still have a long way to go should stay put and book into a hotel to get some proper rest.