

Safety Bulletin

Know Your Risk for Obstructive Sleep Apnea

Your eyes get heavy. You struggle to focus. You yawn. If it's the middle of your shift, you may reach for that second (or third) cup of coffee. Before you do, also consider your overall health and the quality of your sleep.

Obstructive sleep apnea (OSA) affects nearly one-third of all commercial motor vehicle (CMV) carriers, according to the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA). With OSA you have short pauses of breathing—10 seconds or less—while you sleep. If left untreated, OSA can be life threatening.



It's become such a serious concern that the FMCSA's Medical Review Board is reviewing its recommendations on how often CMV drivers must be screened for OSA. These recommendations aren't final, but the first draft points to various risk factors you should know.

These include:

- Body mass index (BMI, weight in kilograms divided by height in meters) of 40 or more (or a BMI of 33 or more plus at least three of the risk factors below)
- Age 42 or older
- Male
- Postmenopausal female
- Have one or more of the following health conditions: diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, an undersized jaw (micrognathia), a specific type of overbite (retrognathia) or untreated hypothyroidism
- Neck size greater than 17 inches (male) or 15.5 inches (female)
- Loud snoring
- Witnessed apneas (pauses in breathing during sleep)
- Small airway to the lungs

If you have any of the above symptoms, talk with your doctor. If your doctor suspects OSA, he or she may recommend a sleep study. That means you'll likely spend a night at a sleep center and will be evaluated by the center's sleep technicians. If you are found to have moderate-to-severe OSA, you will need to be effectively treated so you can continue driving. Use of a CPAP (continuous positive airway pressure) machine while sleeping is one potential remedy for OSA.

As a CMV driver, your ability to be fully alert helps to keep roads safe. Knowing your risk for OSA—and getting treated for it as needed—plays an important role.