

## **Important Message to Our Transportation Industry Clients**

Tri-State Occupational Health is sending this important message to our client companies who have drivers requiring Federal Medical Certification (49 FCR 391.40). We would like to make you aware of important updates to the practice of Obstructive Sleep Apnea (OSA) screening in accordance with The Joint Task Force recommendations to the Federal Motor Carrier Service Administration (FMCSA) published in 2006<sup>1</sup> and supported through the medical research since that time.

As you know, Obstructive Sleep Apnea can make commercial driving hazardous, both for drivers and the public. About 17-28% of truck drivers have OSA, most without knowing it. Untreated, OSA increases the risk for crash by 2 to 7 times. Between 7 and 20% of all commercial vehicle accidents happen because the drivers fall asleep behind the wheel. Even greater than this proportion is the amount of crashes believed to result from mental slowing and response time while driving due to sleep disruption, though this has not been quantified. More than 5000 people die in large truck crashes in the United States annually.<sup>2</sup>

Lack of awareness causes many with OSA to remain untreated. Because the condition develops gradually, often over decades, OSA sufferers do not recognize how drowsy they are or how poorly they sleep. It is not uncommon for the Medical Examiner to refer drivers who deny symptoms of sleep apnea for sleep testing, only to discover that the driver literally stops breathing in excess of a minute, sometimes as frequently as every 5 minutes, while their sleep is tested. This has a tremendous impact on the ability of the commercial driver to function safely on the road, not to mention his/her health. Fortunately, treatment can control this condition and greatly reduce the risk to the driver and the public.

Commercial Driver Medical Examiners must screen for OSA, even among drivers who deny awareness of disordered breathing in their sleep or drowsiness while driving. But this does not mean every driver must have a sleep study. After all, the statistics quoted above mean that most truck drivers don't have OSA and complete long careers while being accident-free.

We, at Tri-State Occupational Health, appreciate that you have trusted us with the responsibility to evaluate your commercial drivers, certifying only those who we believe can drive safely, from a medical standpoint, on your behalf. To add value to the exams you obtain from us, we have sought a balanced and uniform approach to identify drivers with Obstructive Sleep Apnea, while recognizing your costs of doing business.

We plan to implement the recommendations of the Joint Task Force of three major professional groups that came together in 2006 to investigate OSA in commercial drivers. These groups were The American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, The American College of Chest Physicians, and the National Sleep Foundation. This Joint Task Force recommends a polysomnogram (sleep study) if the individual meets

screening criteria that consider snoring or sleepiness, medical history, body mass index (BMI) and neck circumference. Our clinic will screen all drivers according to the recommendations set forth by the Joint Task Force which reflects our responsibility to driver, employer, and public. We recognize that the FMCSA has not yet responded to these recommendations which reflect the rule-making process, not its priorities. Understand that the FMCSA makes very few rules but requires that the medical examiner use medical judgement and current best practice to ensure public safety. For the medical examiner, this makes the approach to OSA screening no different from the approach to any medical or physical condition.

We recognize that OSA screening can be inconvenient and confirmatory testing can be expensive. Currently, most insurance provides coverage of the polysomnogram under specific diagnostic codes which should be explored by the driver with his physician and insurance company. There are some cheaper alternatives that yield inconsistent results and may require further testing. We expect the cost to decrease and accessibility to increase in years to come as awareness increases.

Our Clinic will implement these changes effective immediately. If a driver is identified as meeting criteria for a sleep study, we will give a 90-day medical certificate so that the driver has the opportunity to have testing completed through his personal physician and still continue to drive, barring other immediate concern to safety while driving. Following testing, if OSA is diagnosed, we will extend the medical certificate an additional 90 days to allow the driver to demonstrate compliance with treatment. For drivers with known sleep apnea, we ask the driver to present a compliance report at the time of evaluation to document adequate use of their machine.

We consider it a privilege to assist you in meeting the medical needs of your workforce, and applaud your contribution to keeping our roadways safe.

Sincerely,

Joe Trannel, Manager  
Tri-State Occupational Health

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<sup>1</sup> Hartenbaum N, Coilop N, Rosen IM, et al. Sleep apnea and commercial motor vehicle operators: statement from the Joint Task Force of the American College of Chest Physicians, American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, and the National Sleep Foundation. *J Occup Environ Med.* 2006; 49(9 Suppl): S4-37.

<sup>2</sup> Parks PD, Durand G, Tsismenakis AJ, Vela-Bueno A, Kales SN. Screening for obstructive sleep apnea during commercial driver medical examinations. *J Occup Environ Med.* 2009; 51(3): 275-82.