

HED: At the heart of long haul

Blurb: Shell Rimula believes that driver health and education lie at the fore in the prevention of road accidents for truck drivers

As an advocate of driver wellness and health, Shell Rimula is committed to promoting road safety and education amongst both private and professional drivers.

As Shell Rimula ensures the proper operating condition of an engine, they believe the same ethos should be encouraged for truck drivers, ensuring that the person behind the wheel is in optimal condition to perform their jobs to the best of their abilities in a responsible manner.

The latest eNatis statistics calculate the amount of heavy duty trucks on South African roads as 373 343, a sizeable number which require the expertise of skilled drivers not only to deliver the specified goods, but to ensure the safety of other road users.

Not all truck drivers are subjected to the same daily stresses and occupational challenges. The profession however rates as one of the most dangerous and stressful jobs in the world, and the lifestyle of many professional drivers often plays into their performance. There are a number of influential factors that diminish their health.

### **The driving factors**

- Lack of exercise
- Diet, eating habits and obesity
- Stress
- Hypertension
- HIV
- Smoking
- Fatigue

### **Lack of exercise**

According to Time magazine research, scientists and experts have indicated that sedentary behaviour such as sitting all day, presents a higher risk factor for earlier deaths. Many truck drivers are pressured in to meeting stringent time constraints that they become susceptible to a number of health issues, citing lack of time as their primary reason.

### **Diet, obesity, and diabetes**

It is incredibly difficult to consider healthy eating when on the road, and it's no wonder many truckers simply rely on fast food and sugary energy drinks in order to remain what they may consider "productive" on the roads. Unfortunately, this mentality and unhealthy eating habits can have drastic consequences further down the road.

By consuming fewer processed foods in conjunction with increasing the intake of fruits and vegetables can not only assist in weight loss, but promote immune boosting properties.

A diet high in sugar and carbohydrates can result in a number of health conditions, including obesity and the silent killer – diabetes.

### **Stress**

Being away from home for countless days plays a part in the stress of a truck driver. We often forget that many of these drivers have families, and often the responsibility shifts to the spouse of the driver to ensure that they run the household and ensure the wellbeing of the children.

Furthermore, the time constraints placed on them leads to additional stress, as do dispatchers, equipment malfunction, traffic jams, inconsiderate drivers, and general personal issues.

## **Hypertension**

High blood pressure – or hypertension as it is known in the medical world - is a major factor affecting commercial truck drivers. This is a medical condition where the blood pressure in the arteries is elevated. Blood pressure refers to the force in which the blood is hitting artery walls. When the force is too high it can cause serious health issues such as heart disease and strokes.

Corporate Wellness Magazine in the United States reports that 87% of truckers in the States have hypertension or pre-hypertension, in addition to a 50% higher rate of diabetes than the general population. Both of these conditions are markers for increased cardiovascular disease risk.

## **HIV**

HIV and STD's have always been a topical discussion in the overall health of a truck driver. Often away from home for long periods, some drivers engage in acts with sex workers both in South Africa as well as cross border. Often, these drivers may have unknowingly been infected with the disease or simply spreading it to a partner.

According to research by Taylor & Francis in conjunction with Global Health Action, despite widespread HIV knowledge, sex workers contend with persistent challenges regarding condom use negotiation, induced by more money in the exchange for unsafe sex. Despite the placement of wellness centres in truck stops along the highway, truck drivers face stigma related challenges with regards to testing for HIV and personal acknowledgement of their involvement in the sex trade.

## **Smoking**

While smoking presents harmful effects to everyone, truck drivers in particular face distinct challenges. Truck drivers may smoke for many of the same reasons others do. Some start long before their career path has been chosen and then find it difficult to quit, even though they may want to. A more common reason for truckers is that it is a highly stressful job, and smoking “takes the edge off.”

There are numerous problems with frequent inhalation of tobacco smoke, and the risk of lung cancer is merely the beginning. Smokers are also at a higher risk of suffering a heart attack or stroke due to the constriction of blood vessels and lowered blood oxygen levels. Additionally, chronic lung diseases are common among smokers, including emphysema and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, as well as less life threatening but incurable conditions like asthma.

## **Fatigue**

Exhaustion and fatigue in truck drivers play a major factor in the heightened risks of accidents occurring. Although the basic employment act highlights suitable working hours, many drivers are under pressures from their employers while some choose to ignore suitable working hours in order to potentially make additional money. As a result, these drivers' not only become a danger to themselves and the loss of financial remuneration from possible load damage, but to other motorists on the road at the time.

## **Conclusion**

Modern driver training extends beyond simply training drivers how to ensure correct driving patterns and behaviour, and now includes lifestyle advice. With a number of initiatives currently in the country, drivers should take action and adopt a healthier lifestyle. It will not only benefit your job, but your life.

