

# Position Statement: Sleep Apnea Screening for Commercial Motor Vehicle and Rail Industries

## Introduction

The American Alliance for Healthy Sleep (AAHS) is an organization comprising patients with sleep disorders, sleep providers, and others interested in healthy sleep; the AAHS is dedicated to improving the lives of patients with sleep disorders and furthering healthy sleep for all.

## Dangers of Untreated Obstructive Sleep Apnea

Obstructive sleep apnea (OSA) is a common sleep disorder that affects nearly 30 million adult Americans;<sup>1</sup> OSA causes an individual to stop breathing during sleep as the airway is blocked. Because the individual wakes during the night, up to several hundred times in severe cases, the person will frequently have increased daytime sleepiness or feel fatigued during the day. Untreated sleep apnea can have severe health consequences, including increased risk for heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, diabetes and depression.

An estimated 28% of commercial drivers and 7% of railway workers in safety-sensitive positions have OSA.<sup>2,3</sup> A majority of these individuals are undiagnosed and untreated; this results in truck drivers or rail workers who are experiencing sleepiness and fatigue while performing work duties, including driving or operating trains, resulting in decreased attention and reaction time and ultimately increased accidents and errors. Fatigue has been identified as a causal factor in 13% of commercial vehicle accidents<sup>4</sup>, and the odds of a commercial driver with untreated OSA having an accident is 243% higher than other drivers.<sup>5</sup> Several major railway and highway accidents have been attributed to untreated sleep apnea causing loss of life, injuries and millions of dollars in damages<sup>6</sup>. Sleep apnea screening programs have shown success in decreasing accidents by increasing education about and treatment of OSA.<sup>7</sup> Instituting a screening program for sleep apnea for safety-sensitive trucking and rail positions would improve the health of transportation workers and reduce the likelihood of future accidents or errors caused by untreated OSA.

## Position

It is the position of the AAHS that untreated sleep apnea among trucking and railway workers poses a significant safety risk to the public and health risk to individuals in these industries suffering from this disease. As such, the AAHS supports widespread sleep apnea screening for truck and railway workers in safety-sensitive positions. However, the rights, well-being and livelihood of patients should be protected, and individuals with sleep apnea who are effectively treated should not be discriminated against for safety-sensitive trucking and rail positions due to their diagnosis.

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<sup>1</sup> Watson NF. Health care savings: the economic value of diagnostic and therapeutic care for obstructive sleep apnea. *J Clin Sleep Med* 2016;12(8):1075–1077.

<sup>2</sup> Pack A.L., Dinges D.F., & Maislin G. (2002). *A study of prevalence of sleep apnea among commercial truck drivers (Report No. DOT-RT-02-030)*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Transportation, FMCSA

<sup>3</sup> Raslear TG. Prevalence and treatment of OSA in safety-critical railroad employees. *J Sleep Disord Ther.* 2014;3:179.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration. (2007). *The Large Truck Crash Causation Study*. (Publication No. FMCSA-RRA-07-017). (Table 2). Washington, D.C. <http://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/safety/research-and-analysis/large-truck-crash-causation-study-analysis-brief>. Accessed April 27, 2018.

<sup>5</sup> Gurubhagavatula I, Sullivan S, Meoli A, Patil S, Olson R, Berneking M, Watson NF. Management of obstructive sleep apnea in commercial motor vehicle operators: recommendations of the AASM Sleep and Transportation Safety Awareness Task Force. *J Clin Sleep Med.* 2017;13(5):745–758.

<sup>6</sup> McKay MP. Fatal Consequences: Obstructive Sleep Apnea in a Train Engineer. *Annals of Family Medicine.* 2015;13(6):583-586. doi:10.1370/afm.1868.

<sup>7</sup> Berger MB, Sullivan W, Owen R, Wu C. A Corporate Driven Sleep Apnea Detection and Treatment Program: Results and Challenges. Protecting Professional Drivers website. <http://ppdsleep.com/sleep-disorders-and-sleep-apnea-publications/>. Published 2005. Accessed April 27, 2018.