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The Truth about Obstructive Sleep Apnea

The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) defines obstructive sleep apnea (OSA) as "a respiratory disorder characterized by a reduction or cessation of breathing during sleep..in which affected individuals awaken partially and may experience gasping and choking as they struggle to breathe.[1]" The Agency believes that "OSA may culminate in unpredictable and sudden incapacitation (e.g., falling asleep at the wheel), thus contributing to the potential for crashes, injuries, and fatalities," and that "OSA raises health and safety concerns beyond those of other sleep disorders.[2]"

However, proponents of OSA screening fail to recognize that sleep apnea is not a new disorder, but a condition that has affected millions of people over several decades and yet there has not been the carnage and devastation on our roadways that FMCSA would have us believe is inevitable without stricter mandatory OSA screening regulations. FMCSA's own studies in particular have found that there is "no association between sleep apnea, as measured by the apnea/hypopnea index, and commercial motor vehicle crashes. Patients with sleep apnea had no greater probability of having a crash than patients without sleep apnea, either before or after their diagnosis. Drivers with sleep apnea were also not found to be at an increased risk for multiple crashes, nor were crash rates impacted by the prevalence of apnea. No link between the severity of sleep apnea and traffic crashes.[3]"

While, FMCSA's own data and research demonstrates that there is no causal link between sleep apnea and CMV accidents, it is frequently stated that between 7 and 20 percent of all large truck crashes are due to drowsy and fatigued driving which in turn is supposedly linked to OSA. According to OOFI's own research and statistics however, those owner-operators who are currently receiving treatment for OSA have a crash rate of 0.36 crashes per million vehicle miles traveled (MVMT), which is four times better than the national average of 1.47 as the average owner-operator with sleep apnea has over 2 million miles of accident free driving.

If a conservative 26 percent of all truck drivers had a body mass index of 33, along with at least three other factors recommend by the MRB, requiring them to undergo a PSG, it would cost the trucking industry between $624 million and $7.3 billion just for OSA testing. While the potential cost of treatment would be between $116 million to $1.5 billion and $440 million to $5.5 billion. Thus, the total potential cost to the industry, not including costs for travel, time off work, and maintenance, is approximately $740 million to $2.07 billion or $7.7 billion to $12.8 billion.

Cost	Low End Estimate	High End Estimate
Sleep Test	$624	$7,300
Treatment	$116-$1,500	$440-5,500
Total	$740-$2,070	$7,700-12,800

[1] *Evaluation of Safety Sensitive Personnel for Moderate-to-Severe Obstructive Sleep Apnea*, FMCSA-2015-0419 and FRA-2015-0111 (March 2016).
[2] "FMCSA Bulletin to Medical Examiners and Training Organizations Regarding Obstructive Sleep Apnea," FMCSA (Jan 2015).
[3] Lawrence C. Barr et al., *Sleep Apnea Crash Risk Study*, FMSCA (2004).

OOIDA
Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association Foundation, Inc.
A subsidiary of Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association Inc.
1 NW OOIDA Drive • PO Box 1000 • Grain Valley, MO 64029 • Tel: (816) 229-5791 • Fax: (816) 427-4468
e-mail: foundation@ooida.com • website: www.ooidafoundation.org