



Weekly Safety Briefings

September 10, 2021

Fatigue in the Workplace

Introduction

Feeling fatigued at work is not merely an annoyance, it can also lead to serious safety incidents. There have been many serious workplace accidents that can be directly linked to overly tired employees that led to the death of many. Understanding the causes and more importantly the ways to prevent or reduce workplace fatigue is a critical factor in keeping yourself and your colleagues safe.

Monday – What is Workplace Fatigue

Workplace fatigue is something that often happens when there is a conflict between a person's work schedule and their sleep schedule or sleep habits. Too little, poor quality or interrupted sleep over an extended period can result in fatigue, which is the body's signal that it needs a period of rest. OSHA states "the body operates on a circadian rhythm sleep/wake cycle". Demanding work schedules may disrupt the body's natural cycle, leading to increased fatigue, stress, and lack of concentration.

Tuesday– Effects of Fatigue

Yesterday we defined workplace fatigue. Today we will focus on the effects of fatigue at work.

OSHA points out "worker fatigue increases the risk for illnesses and injuries,". In studying the relative risk of incidents in the morning, afternoon, and night shifts of 8-hour shift systems, the National Institutes of Health identified an 18% increased risk in the afternoon shift and a 30% increase in the night shift (compared to the morning shift). The longer the shift, the higher the chances of worker fatigue. OSHA reports "working 12 hours per day is associated with a 37% increased risk of injury."

Wednesday – Importance of Sleep and Safety in the Workplace

Getting an adequate amount of sleep is vital to staying safe in the workplace and outside the workplace. Today we will discuss some statistics regarding how much adequate sleep can impact your day.

According to the National Sleep Foundation, sleep deprivation can be as dangerous as alcohol impairment when you're behind the wheel. The Sleep Foundation writes that "being awake for 18 hours is similar to a blood alcohol level of 0.05 and being awake for a full 24 hours is similar to a blood alcohol level of 0.10, which is over the legal limit".

The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health & Safety (CCOHS) points to this data as a demonstration of why fatigue is a serious workplace hazard. Unlike alcohol consumption, which is easier to detect on the job, fatigue levels are not easily measured or quantified. As a result, it's difficult to isolate the effect of fatigue on accident and injury rates. CCOHS states, "factors that may influence fatigue are shift rotation patterns, balanced workloads, timing of tasks and activities, availability of resources and the workplace environment (e.g., lighting, ventilation, temperature, etc.)."

Thursday – Preventing and Managing Fatigue

The last few days, we defined workplace fatigue, discussed the effects and the importance role sleep plays in your everyday activities. Now let's discuss different ways to manage fatigue to help create a safer work environment.

Center for Disease Control (CDC) recommendations for developing healthy sleep habits:

- Go to bed and get up at the same time, even on the weekends.
- Make sure your bedroom is dark, quiet, relaxing and at a good temperature.
- Don't keep TVs, computers, smartphones or other electronic devices in the bedroom.
- Avoid caffeine, alcohol and big meals before bed.
- Exercise during the day to help yourself fall asleep more easily at night.



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Here are some additional recommendations provided by OSHA:

- If you work evenings or nights, make sure you've slept within the last eight hours before going to work.
- If you're napping before work, try to allow for a complete sleep/wake cycle by napping either for:
 - Less than 45 minutes
 - More than two hours

Friday – Open Discussion

Fatigue in the workplace is not a hazard that should be underestimated. This week we've discussed many aspects of fatigue. Now let's hear from the group and your experiences with fatigue and ways you manage it to stay safe not only in the workplace but in your everyday activities.

- Have you battled with fatigue at work?
- What are some ways you stay energized?
- Do you feel fatigue is a hazard in your workplace?
- What are some ways your department can adjust to minimize fatigue?
- Do you have good sleep habits? What are some of your healthy sleep routines?