

# Workplace Health and Safety Bulletin



## Fatigue and Safety at the Workplace

- Long work hours and/or many consecutive days of work can fatigue workers and make them feel tired, sleepy, irritable, depressed, or giddy. They may lose their appetite, have digestive problems, and are more likely to catch a cold or flu.
- Fatigued workers tend to
  - react more slowly than usual
  - fail to respond to things going on around them or respond incorrectly
  - show poor logic and judgement
  - are unable to concentrate
  - are less motivated and more forgetful
  - have a greater tendency for taking risks
- Poor performance due to fatigue is particularly apparent with tasks that are repetitive and take 30 or more minutes to complete or are complex and require concentration.
- Workers commonly cope with their reduced level of function by
  - working more slowly
  - checking and rechecking their work
  - relying on fellow workers
  - choosing to carry out less critical tasks
- Most people need 7.5 to 8.5 uninterrupted hours of sleep each day; less than this amount leads to a sleep debt that adds up over time. A single night's shortened or disrupted sleep may not affect a worker's performance immediately, but repeated disruptions over days and weeks can affect performance.
- A worker completing an extended work shift may have only 4 to 5 hours for sleep once travel, eating, and social time are taken into account. Mandatory off-duty hours increase the likelihood that a worker will rest or sleep. Rest time can be enhanced with on-site accommodation, prepared meals, and quiet accommodation.
- Consider exposure to hazards such as noise, vibration, chemicals, and extreme temperatures when extending hours of work. An occupational hygiene specialist should be consulted when adjusting occupational exposure limits.
- When selecting personal protective equipment (PPE) such as respirators or specialized clothing, consider the effects on the worker of having to wear the PPE for extended work hours.
- Want more information: Ask for Safety Bulletin ERG015 "Fatigue, Extended Work Hours, and Safety in the Workplace" by calling toll free:

1-866-415-8690

or visit:

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