



Fatigued? Exhausted?

Fatigue is defined as the increasing difficulty in performing mental and physical activities. This is typically a consequence of inadequate restorative sleep; however, other factors such as health and emotional issues can also play a role. Fatigue has been studied extensively in key industries such as transportation, chemical and nuclear due to the potential for catastrophic losses. Fact is we have all experienced fatigue at one time or another and to varying degrees. No job is exempt and no employee is immune to fatigue.

The key to managing fatigue is to understand the risk identifiers. The level of fatigue is dependent on the number, frequency, and duration of the risk factors which may include:

- Consecutive night shifts
- More than 50 hours per work week
- Adequacy and quality of sleep
- Repetitive or monotonous work
- Physical demands of the job
- Length of commute
- Fast pace work, or high level of concentration
- Personal health and emotional stability
- Time between shifts.

Symptoms of fatigue can vary in type and intensity. A key component to managing fatigue is to recognize the symptoms which may include:

- Slow reaction time
- Reduced awareness/vigilance
- Impaired memory
- Impaired vision
- Irritability
- Difficulty keeping your eyes open
- Impaired decision-making
- Loss of situational awareness
- Performance decrement
- Microsleeps
- Lack of motivation
- Depression
- Loss of appetite and digestive problems.

It is important for all employees to know the signs and symptoms of fatigue for self recognition of fatigue, or recognition of fatigue in a co-worker.

Simply put, fatigue is fatigue; however, fatigue can either be work-related or non-work related and one influences the other. The difference is that work-related fatigue needs to be managed by employers, while non-work related fatigue needs to be managed by the individual. For example, an employer can provide 16 hours between shifts, yet if an employee's personal life only allows for 6 hours of sleep that employee will be at an increased risk for fatigue and an incident or injury.

The long-term health effects of fatigue associated with shift work and chronic sleep loss may include heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, gastrointestinal disorders and depression. Of course of equal concern, are the near term safety consequences of fatigue which would include decreased alertness, higher error rates, slowed reaction time, poor judgment of performance when assessing risk, inability to remember sequence of events, injuries and accidents.

Managing fatigue can be accomplished using various control measures. Here are a few examples for employers and employees.

Employers:

- Limit total hours per week to 55
- Have a policy on second jobs
- Use forward rotation when a three shift roster is used
- Allow for breaks
- Encourage car pooling (22-24% of all crashes are related to drowsiness)
- Encourage healthy eating and an overall healthy life style
- Eliminate repetitive, boring jobs
- Provide training to allow multi-tasking and effective job rotation
- Monitor employees' activities
- Educate employees on fatigue
- Optimize work conditions including ergonomics, lighting, glare and ventilation.

Employees:

- Plan social activities to ensure you get sufficient sleep
- Limit alcohol consumption as it can disturb sleep patterns
- Night shift workers need to maintain a strict routine for diet and sleep
- Exercise
- Arrive at work "Fit for Duty".

Currently, OSHA does not have a specific standard for extended or unusual work shifts which result in fatigue; however, this does not exempt an employer from recognizing fatigue as a potential hazard that needs to be addressed in the workplace.

Please contact Chris Schneider at 610.524.5525 ext 14, cschneider@1ssh.com to discuss any questions you have regarding heat stress and how we can help.