Fatigue Can Be Fatal



Fatigue can lead to mistakes on the job. And those mistakes can lead to injuries and fatalities. Unfortunately, the shiftwork and physical demands inherent in many jobs mean worker fatigue is far from uncommon.

Employees often work shifts that consist of many more consecutive hours or days than the average worker in this country. Additionally, people working the night shift are often faced with hazardous work that is deliberately scheduled when fewer employees are on site.

However, job performance at night tends to be poorer, for a number of reasons:

- It’s harder to see. Artificial lights can’t illuminate everything, resulting in falls, spills and other incidents.
- Drivers are more likely to fall asleep at the wheel for a few seconds or a few minutes.
- Workers with low seniority are often assigned graveyard or swing shifts, and may lack knowledge of safe work practices.
- Poor sleep between shifts means fatigue on the job.

Symptoms of fatigue include tiredness, irritability, depression or giddiness. Fatigued workers may lose their appetite, have digestive problems or pick up cold or flu infections more easily. Fatigue can result not just from actual sleep loss, but also from shiftwork that interrupts the body’s natural cycle of sleep and wakefulness.

On the job, fatigued employees may:

- have delayed reaction times, and work more slowly
- show poor judgment
- take more risks
- be less motivated, more forgetful and prefer simpler tasks
- have trouble concentrating, and need to double-check their work often perform poorly at complex tasks

To avoid fatigue, employees need to:

- aim for seven to eight hours of uninterrupted sleep daily.
- keep to a regular sleep schedule in a dark, quiet and comfortable location.
- avoid alcohol, caffeine and tobacco, especially before sleeping.
- maintain good nutrition, for long-lasting energy.
- stick to an exercise program.
- reduce the effects of on-the-job factors such as noise, vibration, chemicals and extreme temperature.
- choose personal protective equipment that will be suitable to wear for long hours at work.

While shiftwork is a necessity in many industries today, doing what you can to avoid fatigue will protect you and others from accident and injury.