

Fatigue - managing the risk

DR KATHRYN DE LUC explains how fatigue management can protect shiftworkers from harm.

With today's 24/7 society demanding that many people work shifts or extended hours, managing fatigue in the workplace has become an important issue.

With the pressure in today's society to work more hours, fatigue and its consequences are costing New Zealand businesses millions of dollars a year.

The HSE Act requires employers to take all practicable steps to prevent harm from workplace hazards – and these include fatigue and the behaviour of fatigued workers.

If employees are working long or unsocial hours, resulting in poor quality sleep and disrupted circadian rhythms, there will be fatigue issues in the organisation.

Watch for signs

Common signs, and possible consequences, of fatigue include the following:

- Increased reaction times – A truck driver fails to brake in time, causing an accident.
- Reduced concentration – A doctor makes a drug prescription error.
- Micro-sleeps – A worker, driving home after night shift, nods off at the wheel and runs into a school bus.
- Muddled thinking – A train controller gives confusing or incorrect instructions to a repairman working on the tracks.

- Reduced motivation – A worker fails to wear the required safety equipment.
- Impaired judgment – A worker drives when too fatigued to do so safely.
- Increased risk taking – A pilot chooses to fly in poor weather conditions.
- Increased mistakes – A casino worker pays out over the odds.

Management measures

The challenge for organisations is how to manage the risk of fatigued workers. Successful management requires an integrated approach, including the following measures:

- Implement a fatigue management policy for your organisation.
- Assess staff rosters and hours for indicative fatigue levels.
- Identify appropriate fatigue counter-measures – including the strategic use of food and drinks, power napping, bright light, sound, noise or change of activity.
- Regularly train and assess staff on fatigue management.
- Provide fatigue leadership training for managers/supervisors – including training on how to spot fatigued staff and what to do about it.
- Include screening for sleep disorders in staff health monitoring.
- If you provide food on site, review whether you are offering the right types of food to help staff keep awake.
- Regularly assess how individuals are coping with shiftwork, using standardised tests. (As shiftworkers get older they may find it harder to cope due to changes in sleep patterns.)
- Consider fatigue as a possible cause in all accident and incident investigations.
- Instigate an audit system to

regularly analyse fatigue-related incidents and close-calls.

Avoid fragmentation

It is important not to implement individual measures in isolation, as they are designed to impact and build on one another. For example, the results of an "hours of work" assessment can be incorporated into training and education materials, and/or into identifying appropriate fatigue counter-measures.

With the pressure in today's society to work more hours, fatigue and its consequences are costing New Zealand businesses millions of dollars a year

in reduced performance, errors, incidents, accidents, sickness, absenteeism and staff turnover. Managing fatigue-related risks should be a central component of any health and safety and risk management strategy. ■

For further information on managing the risks of fatigue, visit www.shiftwork.co.nz.

DR KATHRYN DE LUC is a director of Shiftwork Services Ltd, a consultancy and training organisation specialising in fatigue, risk management and rostering solutions.

SAFEGUARD

Buyers Guide 2008/09

New Zealand's print and online directory for seekers of health & safety products and services.

List in this year's edition and grow your business!

The essential tool for people seeking health & safety products and services. More than 5000 copies distributed free with the Sept/Oct edition of *Safeguard*, and to enquirers at offices of ACC and the Department of Labour.

Large distributor? Small consultancy? A listing drives business your way. Your listing and website link also appears in *Safeguard's* online Buyers Guide, NZ's largest health & safety marketplace.

Book your listing by 20 June to get Earlybird pricing. Bookings close: 22 August 2008.

Interested in listing?
Visit www.safeguard.co.nz for a media kit, phone 09 360 3704, or email buyersguide@safeguard.co.nz

**THOMSON
BROOKERS**