Fatigue on the Job Meeting Kit

Fatigue on the Job Safety Talk

Workers suffering from fatigue—physical and mental—are not only less productive and more prone to illness but also more distracted and thus more likely to be involved in a safety incident.

Fatigue can be broadly defined as a feeling of weariness, tiredness or lack of energy. Fatigue is a common complaint but, medically speaking, it's recognized more as a symptom or cause of other conditions than as a condition itself. The best way to understand fatigue is along a continuum. On one end of the spectrum is the fatigue that most of us occasionally experience in the course of our lives when we get physically or mentally overburdened. This kind of fatigue isn't serious and can usually be resolved simply and quickly, such as by getting extra rest. On the other end is a less common but more serious form of fatigue that's symptomatic of a more chronic and disabling condition, such as major depressive disorder or chronic fatigue syndrome. This form of fatigue is an acute and/or ongoing state of tiredness that leads to mental or physical exhaustion and prevents people from functioning as usual.

FATIGUE IS A WORKPLACE HAZARD

Everyone should be concerned about the impact of fatigue as it can be considered a form of impairment, making fatigue a **Workplace Hazard.** However, fatigue levels are not easily measured or quantified; therefore, it is difficult to isolate the effect of fatigue on incident and injury rates.

Work-related factors may include long work hours, long hours of physical or mental activity, insufficient break time between shifts, changes to jobs or shift rotations, inadequate rest, excessive stress, having multiple jobs, or a combination of these factors.

SYMPTOMS OF FATIGUE

Workers who are fatigued exhibit the following reactions:

- excessive yawning;
- irritability;
- bloodshot eyes;
- poor performance;
- lack of focus

If you have identified any fatigued workers in your workplace, discuss the issue of fatigue with them as soon as practicable. You may also choose to discuss the issue with other workers who could be at risk of fatigue.

FATIGUE DANGERS – ON THE JOB

- Fatigue reduces your ability to make decisions and to do complex planning. Communication skills and your ability to respond to and remember directions.
- Fatigue slows your reaction time, and your ability to respond to changes in surroundings or information provided.
- Fatigue lowers your productivity and performance and your ability to handle stress. It makes it hard to stay awake, increases forgetfulness and increases errors in judgment.

Experiencing one or more of these factors can make you dangerous to work with, because it increases the chances for incidents and injuries.

HOW TO PREVENT FATIGUE

One of the most important ways to protect against fatigue is to get enough rest. For most people that means seven to eight hours of sleep per night.

Try these tips for getting a good night’s sleep:

- Go to bed and get up at same time every day, and weekends. Get a minimum of 7 hours a night.

- Don’t eat too close to bedtime, as doing so can cause heartburn and just generally make it hard to fall asleep. Do eat a balanced diet of fruits, veggies, healthy fats, proteins and whole grains.
- Turn off your cell phone or tablet at least one hour before you go to sleep and don’t watch TV in bed.
- Exercise regularly, but not too close to bed time. Exercising an hour or so before bed can make it hard to fall asleep.
- Avoid caffeine, tobacco and alcohol before bed as well. Stay away from foods and drinks that contain caffeine for at least five hours before bedtime.
- Keep your room dark and cool. Most of us sleep better in a cooler room.

SAFE WORK PRACTICES TO PREVENT OR IMPROVE FATIGUE ISSUES

- If your work schedule is too demanding or the hours you are working are making you feel fatigued every single day, talk with a supervisor. Sometimes responsibilities or schedules can be altered to improve productivity and safety in the workplace.
- It is important to understand the side effects of medication before using it at work. Talk with your doctor to make sure he/she understands your work responsibilities to ensure the medication will not interfere with your performance.
- Take care of your health. Addressing other health issues can greatly improve how you feel both at home and at work.
- Eat a better diet. Food to humans is as gasoline is to a car– if you put dirty gas in your car it will not run well. Same goes for your body!
- For short periods of less intense fatigue, use caffeinated beverages to help you wake up. Another option is to get up from where you are working to stretch or take a walk.

EMPLOYEES TAKEAWAY

- Reduce the effects of on-the-job factors such as noise, vibration, chemicals and extreme temperature.

FINAL WORD

Fatigue at work doesn’t have to turn into a nightmare of injuries and accidents. Take care of yourself by getting enough sleep, eating right and knowing the factors that trigger fatigue.