Shiftwork Stats and Facts

DID YOU KNOW?

Roughly 25 million Americans are shift workers with rotating or irregular work schedules. Many of them work in retail, but they also work in food service, personal care, and the service sector.

Rondal works shifts at a grocery store. He’s paid hourly, but his hours fluctuate – so his income, and his free time, are never certain. Week to week, he might not make enough money, or have to drop everything at moment’s notice to work more hours.

According to 2004 data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, almost 15 million Americans work full time on evening shift, night shift, rotating shifts, or other employer arranged irregular schedules. According to U.S. National Health Interview data from 2010, almost 19% of working adults work 48 hour or more per week and over 7% worked 60 hours or more. Both shift work and long work hours have been associated with health and safety risks.

One week, for example, a shift worker like Rondal could work 30 hours – and the next week, only 4. Nationwide, weekly work hours fluctuate among shift workers up to 87%.

The term shift work refers to any work schedule that falls outside the hours of 7 am and 6 pm1. Shift work can include evening, night, and early morning shifts, as well as fixed or rotating schedules. According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, approximately 16% of wage and salary employees follow shift work schedules. This includes the 6% who work evening shifts and 4% who work night shifts.

While some employees enjoy working at night and prefer a non-traditional schedule, shift work does carry certain drawbacks. People who work night, early morning, or rotational shifts are at higher risk of developing shift work disorder and other sleep problems.

So many industries utilize shiftwork schedules that nearly 15 million full-time workers in the United States work shifts outside the traditional 9-to-5 or flex-time workday, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Yet those added shifts, implemented specifically to increase profitability, actually may be costing companies money through higher worker injury rates.

By rethinking how you schedule shiftwork, you can help keep workers safe and make each shift more effective.

Based on the findings of a recently published Liberty Mutual Research Institute study modeling the impact of the components of long work hours on injuries and accidents, the loss prevention group developed a program to assess worker injury risk based on such work scheduling factors as time of day, hours per shift, number of consecutive shifts and time between rest breaks.

The program addresses the following shiftwork problems:

- Work-related injuries increased 15.2 percent on afternoon shifts and 27.9 percent on the night shift relative to the morning shift.
- Injury risk increases nearly linearly after the eighth hour of a shift, with risk increasing 13 percent on a 10-hour shift and almost 30 percent on a 12-hour shift.
- As consecutive shifts increase, injury risk also increases, but at a higher rate for night shifts than for day shifts.
- Average risk for injury is 36 percent higher on the last night of a four-consecutive-night shift. Risk increases incrementally over each night on the job: 6 percent higher on the second night, 17 percent higher on the third night culminating at 36 percent on the fourth night.
- Injury risk is 2 percent higher on the second morning/day shift, 7 percent higher on the third day and 17 percent higher on the fourth day than it is on the first shift.
- Injury risk also increases as time between breaks increases. The last 30 minutes of a 2-hour **work period has twice the risk of injury as the 30 minutes immediately after the break.**

The 23 million people in the United States who work the majority of their time outside the traditional Monday through Friday, 9-to-5 hours face challenges in maintaining their alertness and safety that daytime workers do not.

Maintaining employee health and job performance takes on particular importance to employers who operate around the clock.

Each year, *Managing 24×7*, the Cambridge, Mass.-based newsletter for managers in 24-hour operations, conducts a survey of companies that operate 24-hours a day.

This year's survey drew 522 responses from a wide range of industries, including manufacturing, utilities, hospitals, hotels and transportation companies.

The survey found that slightly less than half of the companies responding (43 percent) use 12-hour shift schedules for the majority of their employees.

Fifty eight percent of respondents use rotating schedules in which employees switch between various shifts, compared to 66 percent last year. Among those on 12-hour shifts, 86 percent use rotating schedules.

The issue of whether shiftworkers should be allowed to nap during their breaks has received increasing attention in recent years.

One-third of the companies surveyed said they permit workers to nap on their breaks if it is done discreetly, while 15 percent openly permit and encourage breaktime napping.

Thirty-one percent of respondents forbid naps and discipline workers discovered napping at work.

Most companies pay employees some form of differential pay for working non-daytime shifts, with the average shift differential being 50 cents per hour. Of those companies, the largest group (28 percent) pay between 41 cents and 60 cents.

"Overall the shiftwork practices are getting more favorable," said Ed Coburn, publisher of *Managing 24×7*. "The typical shiftworker in

North America works overtime on a regular basis but less than 200 hours per year, earns 50 cents extra an hour, and is more likely to be able to nap during breaks. There remains some progress to be made however in such areas as overtime management and breaktime napping.”

Each year, the survey includes a question about the most significant change a company has made in the last two years to improve shiftworker health, safety, performance and morale.

Based on different companies” responses to the question, here are some tips you can use to make a difference in your operation.

- When possible, conduct mandated training on the night shift rather than requiring officers to upset their routine and train on the day shift.
- Install a weight room.
- Rotate employees and processes.
- Send health tip inserts in pay envelopes.
- Provide safer parking for evening shifts.
- Modify company nurses” hours to provide some time weekly on night and evening shifts.
- Allow shiftworkers to vote to retain or change schedule at year-end.
- Provide literature on adjusting to shiftwork.
- Offer optional annual health screening.
- Encourage employees to do more strenuous work early in 12-hour shift.
- Implement behavior-based safety program.
- Install natural-light type bulbs in continuously occupied areas.
- Institute drug-testing program.
- Provide hot chocolate along with coffee and tea.