Worker Wellness & Safety: How Health-Behaviours Affect Incident Risk Stats and Facts

FACTS

- **Fatigue Is a Physical Impairment:** A worker who has been awake for 17 hours experiences cognitive and motor impairment equivalent to a blood alcohol concentration of 0.05 percent. Fatigue slows reaction time, reduces hazard recognition, and impairs decision-making – the same functions that protect workers from injury.
- **Sleep Deprivation Is Widespread:** More than 40 percent of U.S. workers report not getting enough sleep. A workforce that is chronically under-rested is a workforce operating at reduced capacity every shift – before any other hazard is introduced.
- **Night Shifts Multiply the Risk:** Accident and injury rates are 18 percent greater during evening shifts and 30 percent greater during night shifts compared to day shifts. The body’s circadian rhythm actively works against alertness during these hours.
- **Substance Use Affects More Than Off-Hours:** Alcohol, prescription medications, opioids, and cannabis can all affect cognitive function, reaction time, and coordination during working hours – even when used outside of work if the residual effects carry into the next shift.
- **Chronic Health Conditions Are Workplace Risk Factors:** Unmanaged diabetes, cardiovascular disease, obesity, and sleep disorders all reduce a worker’s capacity to respond to sudden demands and emergencies that are a routine part of many jobs.

STATS

- 13 percent of workplace injuries are attributable to fatigue, and 43 percent of Americans admit they may be too tired to function safely at work, according to the National Safety Council.
- Accident and injury rates are 18 percent greater during evening shifts and 30 percent greater during night shifts compared to day shifts, according to OSHA. Working 12 hours per day is associated with a 37 percent increased risk of injury.
- Fatigue-related health and lost productive work time costs U.S. employers an estimated $136.4 billion annually, according to OSHA.
- Driving while sleep deprived has the same or worse impact as driving with a blood alcohol concentration of 0.05 percent, according to peer-reviewed research cited by the Sleep Foundation — a cognitive state many workers bring to their jobs without recognizing it as impairment.
- Unintentional overdoses accounted for 388 workplace deaths in the United States in 2020, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics — a figure that represents a significant and growing cause of occupational fatality tied directly to worker health behaviors.