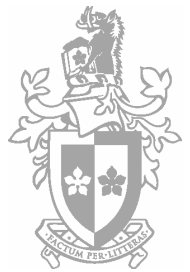


# Health & Safety Information Sheet

## Fatigue in the workplace – Prevention strategies



Fatigue affects a person's health, increases the chance of workplace injuries occurring, and reduces performance and productivity within the workplace. Fatigue can be caused by work-related factors, factors outside work and / or a combination of both, and may accumulate over time.

The factors which contribute to fatigue include:

- The mental and physical demands of the work – Concentrating for extended periods of time
- Work scheduling and planning – working night or extended shifts
- Working time – the time work is performed and the amount of time worked
- Environmental conditions – working in harsh or uncomfortable work environments
- Individual factors – life style factors such as family responsibilities, home environment such as noisy neighbours and personal health conditions such as insomnia, alcohol or drug dependence

### Effects of fatigue

The effects of fatigue on health and work performance can be short term and long term. Short term effects on an individual include impaired work performance, such as a reduced ability to:

Concentrate and avoid distraction

Make decisions

Maintaining vigilance

Appreciating complex situations

Coordination of hand-eye movements, and

Fatigue can also:

Increase error rates

Increase the likelihood of accidents and injuries, and

Thinking laterally and analytically

Remember and recall events and their sequences

Controlling emotions

Recognizing risks

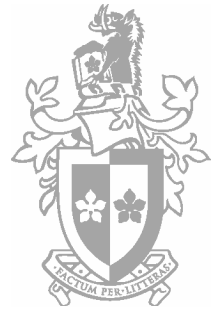
Communicating effectively

Slow reaction times

Cause micro sleeps

Employers who implement fatigue prevention strategies in the workplace can realize

- Better health and safety outcomes
- Fewer workplace incidents and injuries
- Reductions in absenteeism and staff turnover, and
- Better performance and productivity



The risk management approach to managing fatigue helps employers and workers meet their obligations under OHS Act 2004. A risk management approach to fatigue in the workplace recognises that each situation has its own characteristics. The individual circumstances should be assessed to decide the best way of improving health and safety. The following are strategies which can be adopted by the individual when trying to manage fatigue levels:

### **Sleep**

- The best sleep is night sleep
- If sleeping during the day, darken the room and allow more time than normal to fall asleep
- Choose a quiet, peaceful place to sleep and adhere to a routine
- Seven to eight hours uninterrupted sleep is adequate
- Seek medical advice for excessive snoring, irregular breathing and insomnia

### **Drugs & Alcohol**

- Avoid excessive consumption of alcohol – it affects quality of sleep
- Avoid stimulants – they delay the need for sleep
- Do not consume coffee or tea before going to bed

### **Medical conditions**

- If you have a medical condition, you should seek advice from your doctor if you are in a job that involves shiftwork or long working hours
- Tell your employer about any medical conditions that may limit your ability to work or make you susceptible to fatigue
- Ask your doctor for an alternative medication if it causes you drowsiness when you need to be awake

### **Fitness**

- Maintain a basic level of fitness
- Exercise regularly
- Keep your weight in check – obesity contributes to sleeping disorders

The above is a summary of the Work Safe Victoria publication *Fatigue – Prevention in the workplace* ([http://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/wps/wcm/resources/file/eb87fc08b727473/vwa\\_fatigue\\_handbook.pdf](http://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/wps/wcm/resources/file/eb87fc08b727473/vwa_fatigue_handbook.pdf)).

Management units should refer to this publication if they wish to identify and assess the impacts of fatigue in their workforce. Within the publication is a Fatigue hazard identification checklist which prompts managers to consider all factors which contribute to fatigue and how these interact with other hazards such as manual handling and exposure to noise, heat and chemicals in the work place.

The OHS Consultant is available to assist departments when undertaking a risk management approach to fatigue. The OHS Consultant can be contacted on Ext. 8157