

Tools and Resources for Employers - Fatigue

What Can An Employer Do?

Your employees are a vital asset. You can't make sure they get a good night's rest every night, but there are practical steps you can take to help reduce their risk of becoming mentally or physically fatigued, and being involved in an MVI.

Know Your Employees That Drive

Knowing your drivers will help you understand their limitations. Make a point of speaking with them regularly so you become accustomed to their mannerisms and recognize when their physical and verbal behaviors suggest they are fatigued. Better yet, if you create a workplace with open lines of communication, employees will be willing to discuss workload and scheduling challenges that are generating fatigue, and work with you to figure out a solution rather than accept or ignore it.



Recognize the Signs

Whether speaking with your employees in person or on the phone, learn to recognize signs of fatigue. These include:

- employee says they “always feel tired” and/or looks exhausted
- yawning
- eyes look sore, heavy, droopy or blood-shot
- reflexes and reaction time are slow
- impatience or irritability
- employee complains of aching, stiff or sore muscles, or cramps
- lack of motivation
- lack of concentration, responses to questions are slow or off-topic
- unable to make decisions

Support Employee Health and Wellness

An employee with a healthy work-life balance is much less susceptible to fatigue. Host “lunch and learns” that provide tools, guides and ideas that will help staff make healthy lifestyle choices. Encourage more active employees – get group rates for gym passes, have in-house facilities (ping-pong table, stationary cycle, stair machine, etc.), support participation in weekend community events.



Proactive organizations that invest in employee wellness have tracked their success in terms of reduced health benefits costs, lower absenteeism and increased workplace engagement. Encourage all staff to regularly visit their doctor for medical check-ups. Establish non-punitive medical screening for health, fitness and sleep disorders. Arrange driver schedules so they're able to see a doctor, and diagnose and address matters before they become a serious health issue, or contribute to a motor vehicle incident.



Have Realistic Expectations

Hours of service regulations govern commercial drivers, but each driver has a different fatigue tolerance. One driver may be able to function reliably for 13 hours, while another driver's performance declines sharply after 11 hours. A stress-filled 10-hour day is more tiring than an easy going 12-hour day.

The same is true for employees who drive as part of their work, but not full time. If your employee starts their day with a 2-hour drive to the worksite, works for 10 hours, and then has a 2-hour drive back to the shop, during the return drive, they are contending with significant physical and mental fatigue. Work with your employees to build realistic, sustainable schedules.

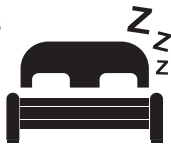
Consider Flexible Scheduling

You've got commitments to your clients and customers. Employees have responsibilities that compete for their time when they are not at work. Research shows that tolerance to schedule changes and irregularities varies among individuals. Some are most alert and productive in the morning, while others work best if they start later and work into the evening.



Capitalize on your employees' strengths, maximize their productivity, and reduce the likelihood they will become fatigued and make costly mistakes while driving. Include your clients in that conversation: do they really need all deliveries at 7:00 a.m.; maybe they would prefer some late afternoon deliveries?

Our circadian rhythm dips and rises over the course of 24 hours. Most adults experience their strongest sleep drive between 2:00-6:00 a.m. and in the afternoon between 3:00-5:00 p.m. Studies show that week day crash frequency peaks between 3:00 - 6:00 p.m. Think about ways you can schedule your drivers to reduce their exposure to those risky conditions.



Optimize Schedules

Organizing a fleet or group of employees to ensure safe and reliable results is challenging. Fleet managers have to contend with delivering an increasing diversity of products and services to clients in more destinations, and with varying schedules. There is a variety of tools available to help – search the web using key words like “fleet scheduling tools”.



Instruct Your Drivers to Take Regular Breaks

Drivers need to take breaks to get fresh air, stretch their limbs and re-hydrate at least every two (2) hours. Insist they do that. Build those breaks into driver schedules.



Instruct Drivers with Proper In-Cab Ergonomics

Any drive – short or long – can result in a sore and tired driver. Go online with your drivers and learn more about how to properly outfit and set-up an ergonomically correct seating configuration.



Check out the information at

- Ergonomics for Truckers
- CCOHS Driving and Ergonomics
- About.com Ergonomics

Are Fatigue Monitoring Devices Right For Your Drivers?

There is an increasing variety of products that monitor drivers to detect their sleepiness or mental fatigue level. The two main types are those that estimate the driver's state by relating eye and eyelid movement to physiological changes, and those that focus on driver performance by monitoring vehicle behavior (such as lane divergence, throttle / braking abruptness, etc.).

Of those devices that estimate driver's state, one approach is to measure "percent eye closure" to determine alertness / attention lapses. Another uses a small LED mounted in eye glasses to measure the velocity of the operator's eyelid movement and how fast and how far they open their eyelid after they close it. Another tool combines a driver's personal fatigue risk profile, their "fatigue risk" before the journey, and alertness information collected while they drive, and issues an alert once they exceed thresholds. Search the web using keywords such as "fatigue monitoring devices".

Fatigue Risk Management System (FRMS)

A Fatigue Risk Management System (FRMS) is a data-driven system, based upon scientific principles and operational knowledge and applied to monitor and mitigate the effects of fatigue and fatigue-related performance errors. An FRMS seeks to identify the factors and sources of fatigue within a work environment, and implement measures to address them.



Although pioneered in the aviation and rail industries, the health and trucking industries increasingly see the value of these programs and measures. Typically, an FRMS will describe the requirements and procedures relating to how a company will schedule trips, roster drivers, establish a driver's fitness to work, educate drivers in fatigue management, manage incidents on or relating to commercial vehicles, and establish and maintain appropriate workplace conditions.

For the past several years, Canadian and American regulators, industry associations, carriers, and researchers have worked to develop a comprehensive approach for managing fatigue among professional drivers. The result is the North American Fatigue Management Program.



The NAFMP is designed to address the issue of driver fatigue and includes:

- Information on how to develop a corporate culture that facilitates reduced driver fatigue
- Fatigue management education for drivers, drivers' families, carrier executives and managers, shippers/receivers, and dispatchers
- Information on sleep disorders screening and treatment
- Driver and trip scheduling information
- Information on Fatigue Management Technologies

