

## Safety Session

# Worker Fatigue

### Overview Of Topic

Fatigue is defined as the condition of being physically or mentally tired or exhausted. Extreme fatigue can lead to uncontrolled and involuntary shutdown of the brain. Fatigue can be dangerous. It can lead to major accidents, even death. You may recall some of the world's major accidents in recent years: Challenger Shuttle Disaster, Three Mile Island Nuclear Power Plant Accident, and the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill. Fatigue seems to have played a role in these accidents. Since we work with machinery, flammable liquids, explosives, radiation, hazardous waste, chemicals, electricity, scaffolds, or ladders, or operate a forklift or other vehicles, the errors caused by fatigue can be critical.

Here is a general look at the causes, warning signs, and ways to fight fatigue:

### Causes

- Sleep loss
- Excessive driving or equipment operation tasks
- Night work
- Exertion (i.e., using chainsaws, mowers, bending back, or working overhead)
- Overexposure to toxic chemicals (i.e., cleaning chemicals, engine exhaust, pesticides)
- Noise
- Heat or cold
- Illness
- Insufficient bright light exposure
- Poor nutrition
- Caffeine and cigarettes
- Alcohol
- Insufficient exercise
- Lack of interest in a task

### Warning signs

- Job performance slows
- Job quality is reduced
- Poor memory
- Trouble solving problems
- Bad decisions
- Errors
- Near-miss accidents
- Can't stay on the road, weaving
- Eyes become fixed on an object for several seconds at a time
- Trouble focusing/keeping eyes open
- Head droops
- Neck muscles feel stiff and/or sore
- Can't stop yawning

## Ways to fight fatigue

- Get 8 hours of sleep before work
- Sleep at the same time each day
- Take all scheduled work breaks.
- Use rubber grips on vibrating tools, and anti fatigue matting for standing long periods of time in one place
- Get acclimatized to working in the heat to avoid heat fatigue and drink plenty of fluids
- Find out if fatigue is a side effect of being exposed to the chemicals to which you are exposed. Protect yourself by using proper personal protective equipment.
- When trying to sleep in the daytime, find a cool, dark, quiet location and use earplugs, soft music, or a fan to block out noise
- See your doctor about sleep disorders, medications, and using bright light
- Eat a well-balanced diet beginning your “day” with high protein foods and ending with carbohydrates. Do not eat great quantities before bedtime.
- Avoid caffeine, alcohol, and cigarettes
- Exercise will give you stamina and help you fall asleep later. Walk/stretch to help you stay awake
- Work carefully; *don't rush*
- Drive carefully to and from work
- Take time *in your schedule* to be with family and friends

## Employee Training

While there are no training requirements regarding fatigue, additional discussion items:

- Outline who and which jobs or duties are prone to physical fatigue.
- Discuss the site chemicals that may cause fatigue. Cover protection methods and what to do if someone becomes fatigued.
- Touch on noise and hearing protection.
- Briefly cover heat exhaustion.
- Go over the frequency and locations of work rest breaks and drinking water along with your policies for their use.
- Discuss your sick day and alcohol policies.