



Notes for the Shift Worker

Issue 2/2005

Working Hours Code of Practice public comment sought

The WA Commission for Occupational Safety and Health has released a draft Code of Practice on working hours for public comment. Input must be received by 16 September 2005.

Development of the draft code follows the review of extended working hours conducted by an expert working group in 2004.

The draft code provides high level, general guidance on risk management in workplaces where employees might be exposed to hazards and risks that could arise from their working hours arrangements.

In addition to fatigue other issues associated with working hours arrangements can include impaired physical and mental performance, symptoms of work-related stress, increased exposure to hazards (e.g. hazardous substances, noise and physical hazards) and longer term health effects.

The draft document seems certain to attract input from every sector of industry and also from health and safety professionals who have been observing the consequences of uncontrolled working hours for the past decade.

Visit www.safetyline.wa.gov.au/pagebin/wswanews0069.htm for a copy of the draft code.

Truck drivers blitzed on Victorian roads

The *Occupational Health and Safety Daily News* reports that scores of Victorian truck drivers have been booked in a national blitz on fatigue.

Police issued 35 penalties for drivers exceeding driving hours, 19 for speeding and 4 for possession of illicit drugs.

Ninety notices were issued for log book offences, 2 for drink driving, 19 for failing to wear seat belts, and 4 for load restraint offences.

Peppermint and cinnamon lower driver frustration and increase alertness

A study into the effects of odours on driving performance, safety, alertness and fatigue indicates that the odours of peppermint and cinnamon enhance motivation, performance and alertness. They decrease fatigue and serve as a central nervous system stimulant.

The author, Dr Bryan Raudenbush, contends that periodic administration of those odours during long term driving may prove beneficial in maintaining alertness and decreasing highway accidents and fatalities.

It would be interesting to apply these findings to haul truck drivers working 12 hour shifts, particularly at night.

Effects of Odor Administration on Driving Performance, Safety, Alertness, and Fatigue, B Raudenbush

Japan - the most sleep deprived nation on Earth

A study conducted by market research from A.C. Nielsen has found that 41% of Japanese manage 6 hours or less sleep per night, making Japan the most sleep-deprived nation on Earth.

According to a 1999 study by Penn State's College of Medicine, even one night of disrupted or missed sleep by a healthy person can drastically alter their chemical balance and also cause daytime sleepiness and fatigue.

The National Institute of Public Health of Japan reports that white collar workers with poor sleep quality are more likely to take sick leave, suffer from poor physical health and have problems in occupational activities as well as personal relationships.

Night pattern of sudden death in OSA

Researchers studying obstructive sleep apnea (OSA) have found that from midnight to 6:00 am (generally a low risk period for death from cardiac causes) sudden death occurred in 46% of people with OSA as compared to 21% of people without OSA, 16% of the general population and the 25% expected by chance.

Increased working hours for Australians

Research to be published later this year shows that there has been a 50% increase in employees working 50 hours a week or more over the last twenty years, with long hours now standard for two out of every five full-time employees.

The research was carried out by Dr Iain Campbell, Senior Fellow at the RMIT University's Centre for Applied Social Research.

Insomnia in adults

A draft statement termed *Manifestations and Management of Chronic Insomnia in Adults* by the USA National Institute of Health following its June conference is available.

The document provides comprehensive coverage of a number of key issues on this topic, and is very readable and informative.

Sobering truths about alcohol and sleep

If you have consumed a moderate or heavy amount of alcohol before sleep, you may find yourself waking up in the middle of the night, and then having trouble getting back to sleep.

Some studies have shown that moderate consumption, as much as six hours before bedtime, can increase wakefulness during certain sleep periods.

After six hours, the alcohol is all but eliminated from your body, which suggests that drinking promotes long-lasting changes to the way the body regulates sleep.

Obesity

An article in the *New England Journal of Medicine* estimates that the current life expectancy in the USA would be one third to three quarters of a year higher if all overweight adults were to attain their ideal weight.

The researchers say that the childhood obesity epidemic has three phases. The first came in the last decade, when child obesity became common but the public health effects weren't felt yet. Phase two is right now as we begin to see serious complications such as type 2 diabetes in very young people. Phase three will see young adults with diabetes starting to have heart attacks, stroke, kidney failure and increased mortality.

Shiftwork lifestyle training

A recent joint study by Circadian Technologies USA and a major surface mining company have found that the provision of shiftwork lifestyle training has lowered rates of absenteeism and turnover compared to companies who provide no training.

The study demonstrated improvements in health and fatigue indices and an increase in daytime sleep length for nightshift workers.

Industrial Health 2005, 43, 201-208.

Fatigue factor in ship accidents

In the UK, the Chief Maritime Investigator in his Annual Report has commented that fatigue among sailors on merchant ships is causing a "worrying number" of collisions or near misses.

Poor judgement or anticipation by officers on watch - "classic symptoms of fatigue" - have also contributed.

In an investigation covering 1,600 accidents over the last 10 years, the main concern was the lack of staff on certain cargo vessels plying the short sea trade, leading many to falsify their timesheets to prove that they are working only a 98 hour week.

Fatigue - real or perceived

According to a British study reported in *Ergonomics Today*, June 2, 2005, insomnia-related impairment may be due largely to a personal perception of sleep quality and length, rather than the actual quality and length.

Researchers monitored the sleep patterns of test subjects and then gave the subjects reports that contradicted the truth. Good sleepers were told that they had slept poorly and vice versa.

Those who were led to believe that they slept poorly reported more fatigue, headaches and sore eyes and were more likely to compensate with a daytime nap.

The researchers concluded that anxiety about sleep causes or worsens the daytime impairment that often accompanies insomnia.