



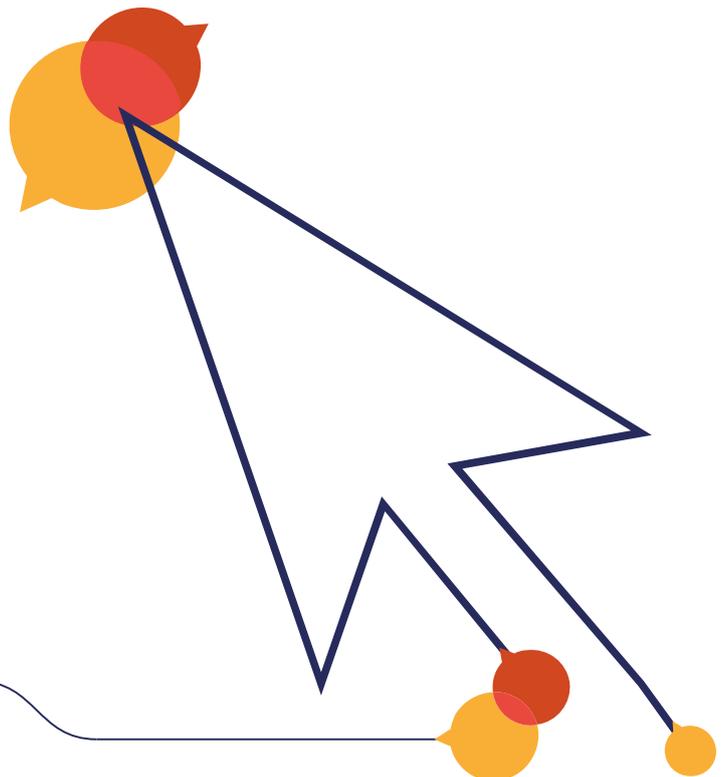
accidents don't have to happen

Fatigue and work



RoSPA Position Statement

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Fatigue is a major but under-recognised hazard in the workplace, adversely affecting workers' health, safety and wellbeing as well as overall organisational effectiveness.

Fatigue contributes significantly to accidents at work, at home, on the road and in other settings. It damages health and significantly reduces quality of life for those affected both directly and indirectly.

Extreme fatigue while at work can result from the interplay of many factors, including shift patterns, physical workload, monotonous and unstimulating work, poor sleep hygiene and other lifestyle factors, medical conditions and/or associated therapies and personal life challenges. Many workers currently experience both temporary and dangerous fatigue as a result of: working long and/or poorly scheduled hours doing several jobs; carrying out tedious, difficult and physically demanding tasks; having challenging caring responsibilities, poor quality and inadequate sleep or travel-to-work difficulties; or experiencing harmful stress associated with domestic and workplace factors.

While excessive physical and mental fatigue can have many causes that are often interconnected, and workers need to address it as best they can, employers have legal duties to assess and control tiredness in the workplace, taking reasonably practicable steps to reduce it and to mitigate its effects.

Fatigue can contribute to accidents and unplanned events by adversely affecting motivation, vigilance/monitoring, reaction times, sustained attention, visual tracking, logical reasoning and calculation, encoding and decoding of information, memory, communication, multi-tasking and complex decision-making. Cumulative fatigue is a significant risk factor not only in front-line safety critical work but also in many other tasks, which, if performed poorly, can result in latent safety problems.

While some workers may be seen as more susceptible to excessive fatigue than others, the potential for exhaustion and tiredness to adversely affect individuals needs to be accepted as a widespread problem potentially affecting every work organisation. Those who suffer from extreme and prolonged mental and physical exhaustion are more likely to develop persistent insomnia, sleepiness, mood disturbance, relationship difficulties, substance abuse, absenteeism and disciplinary problems as well as long-term health detriments such as stomach upsets and cardiovascular disease.

To ensure that excessive physical and mental exhaustion is never ignored, is not stigmatised and is reduced and managed appropriately, organisations must ensure that they put in place appropriate systems, personnel and procedures to achieve these objectives. These include removing or controlling the risk of fatigue by organising and planning the number of hours employees work and how these hours are scheduled, and not simply by observing the requirements of the Working Time Regulations 1998 (as amended). There is also a need to adequately control fatigue risks associated with work patterns, which, while legally compliant, may



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still be fatiguing and hence increase the risk of fatigue-related error, incidents, accidents and possibly ill-health.

As with occupational stress, assessment of fatigue in the workforce requires the adoption of appropriate techniques. The purpose must be to identify problems and trends and to pinpoint specific tasks, shifts, work patterns or demographic factors where fatigue is an issue and to devise effective primary and secondary interventions.

Particular attention must be paid to guidance on managing the health and safety risks of shift work/fatigue as set out in HSE's [*Managing shift work: Health and safety guidance*](#) (HSG256). This book, which is for employers, safety representatives, trade union officials, employees, regulators and other stakeholders, explains employers' legal duties to assess risks associated with shift work. It aims to improve understanding of shift work and its impact on health and safety by: providing advice on risk assessment, design of shift-work schedules and the shift-work environment; suggesting measures employers, safety representatives and employees can use to reduce the negative impact of shift work; and reducing tiredness, poor performance and accidents by enabling employers to control, manage and monitor the risks of shift work. There are many different shift-work schedules, each of which has different features and thus there is no single optimal shift system that suits everyone. HSG256 summarises current knowledge and opinion on the various factors that contribute to the design of shift-work schedules and provides practical advice for reducing the risks of shift work.

RoSPA recommends in general: ensuring that workers have the opportunity to have enough time between shifts to commute, wash, eat, socialise and carry out domestic duties, as well as sleep; restricting consecutive night shifts to a maximum of two to three or two 12-hour shifts; and allowing at least two days off after the last night shift in a string of such shifts. Shifts should always be rotated forwards (early shifts changing to afternoons and afternoons changing to nights). Long shifts should be avoided as should too much over-time. Quality breaks and scope for "power napping" should always be provided (although the latter needs to be treated with caution to make sure it does not introduce additional risks). Scope for workers to self-select shift patterns which suit them best should always be considered.

There are a number of further general steps which all organisations should take to address the problem of fatigue and exhaustion in the workplace:

- Fully consulting the workforce and their representatives about the organisation's overall approach and its programmes of work to address the problem of excessive fatigue
- Developing and communicating a clear policy that destigmatises fatigue, ensuring it is not wrongly described as indolence or laziness
- Delivering workplace awareness-raising about fatigue and its avoidance, including steps to improve and maintain good health and good sleep hygiene
- In particular, training line and middle managers in order to raise their awareness and help them to develop necessary interpersonal skills to engage with individuals about fatigue and the issues involved
- Taking account of fatigue in all risk assessment processes, particularly for safety critical work
- Reviewing fatigue as a possible causal factor in all accidents and incidents



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- Considering any difficulties in travel to and from work which may contribute to fatigue
- Avoiding workers driving when dangerously tired, both when driving for work and driving to and from work
- Engaging outside experts to help
- Ensuring appropriate occupational health support.

Fatigue and extreme tiredness represent a significant psychosocial hazard in workplaces, which, together with the wider problem of occupational stress, may become even more significant as economic and employment conditions change and the extent of sleep deprivation grows due to lifestyle changes. All work organisations need therefore to take an informed and proactive approach to addressing these challenges, not just to protect and enhance the health, safety and wellbeing of their employees and other stakeholders affected by their activities – but to improve their overall operational effectiveness and make their own contribution to tackling an important but still under-recognised public health issue. Against a background of austerity in society generally, increasing demands for “leanness” and unremitting expectations for ever higher personal achievement in the workplace, business leaders need to commit to creating an intelligent and humane culture in their organisations which recognises the corrosive and potentially harmful effects of fatigue and exhaustion and the importance of addressing this problem both sympathetically and systematically.

Roger Bibbings
Partnership consultant
September 2019

Annexes

A. HSE guidance, reports and links

- [HSG256 Managing shift work: Health and safety guidance](#)
- [Human factors: fatigue](#)
- [HSG48 Reducing error and influencing behaviour](#)
- [HSE Contract Research Report 254: Validation and development of a method for assessing the risks from mental fatigue](#)
- [Fatigue Index Calculator](#)
- [Good Practice in Fatigue Management Checklist, HSE Human Factors Toolkit – Topic 2](#)
- [Occupational health and extended working lives in the transport sector](#)
- [Managing offshore shift work and fatigue risk](#)



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B. Useful reading

- [Prof Craig Jackson: Extreme tiredness and fatigue management](#)
- [ORR: Fatigue management](#)
- [TUC: Fatigue – a guide for health and safety representatives](#)
- [Sleep Apnoea Trust Association: Sleep apnoea](#)
- [Health and Safety at Work: Why we need to talk about fatigue](#)
- [AA Foundation: Acute sleep deprivation and risk of motor vehicle crash involvement](#)
- [Safety and Health Practitioner: How do you manage fatigue in the workplace?](#)
- [Safety and Health Practitioner: TfL must tackle bus driver exhaustion after 21% admit having to “fight sleepiness” at the wheel](#)

C. Reports of accidents/incidents caused by or related to fatigue

- [Stoat's Nest Junction, 2018](#)
- [Death of Mark Fiebig, Cambridgeshire, 2002](#)

D. Other reports

- [Developing a fatigue risk management plan: a guide for towing vessel operators](#)



Driver Fatigue
Appendix 3.doc



Fatigue H&S Guide
- Unite.pdf



ENA Company
Fatigue Manager

E. Legal duties

The Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 place general duties on employers to ensure the health and safety at work of their employees. This includes removing or controlling the risk of fatigue by organising and planning the number of hours they work and how these hours are scheduled. Employers also have a responsibility for the health and safety of others who might be affected by their employees' work activities.



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The Working Time Regulations 1998 (as amended) impose specific requirements on employers with regard to the number of hours worked and how these hours are scheduled. Whilst employers need to comply with the requirements of the Working Time Regulations, this may be insufficient to adequately control fatigue risks as some work patterns could be compliant but still be fatiguing and hence increase the risk of fatigue-related error, incidents, accidents and possibly ill-health.





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RoSPA Head Office

28 Calthorpe Road
Birmingham
B15 1RP
☎ +44 (0)121 248 2000

RoSPA Scotland

43 Discovery Terrace
Livingstone House
Heriot-Watt University Research Park
Edinburgh
EH14 4AP
☎ +44 (0)131 449 9378/79

RoSPA Wales

2nd Floor
2 Cwrt-y-Parc
Parc Ty Glas
Cardiff Business Park
Llanishen
Cardiff
CF14 5GH
☎ +44 (0)2920 250600

General Enquiries

☎ +44 (0)121 248 2000
☎ +44 (0)121 248 2001
✉ help@rospa.com
🐦 twitter.com/rospa
📘 facebook.com/rospa
🌐 linkedin.com/rospa

www.rospa.com

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