

## Fatigue in Construction

### What is Fatigue?

In general terms, fatigue occurs when we are low on energy. In more scientific terms, fatigue is physical or mental exhaustion as a result of exertion. Fatigue can be physical or mental and often occurs as some combination of the two. Many additional factors can contribute to fatigue, including lack of sleep, disruption of sleep patterns, diet, time of emotional and chronic health conditions such as diabetes.

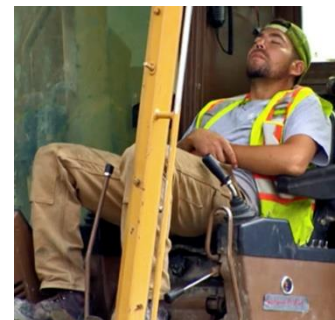
It is estimated that fatigue is at least a contributing factor in a third of all occupational injuries. When the body is fatigued, our situational awareness suffers, along with our memory, concentration and ability to quickly make decisions. Several studies have compared the performance effects of fatigue to being under the effects of alcohol.

Lack of sleep is closely tied to fatigue. It's well-documented that many people don't get enough sleep, with the CDC estimating that one in three Americans don't regularly get the recommended sleep each night. The body repairs damaged tissues and muscles and restores energy levels during sleep, making it an especially critical part of preventing fatigue. So, while lack of sleep and fatigue are closely related, it's not as simple as saying lack of sleep is the only cause of fatigue.

### Risks for Fatigue in Construction

A National Safety Council (NSC) study on fatigue concluded that 100 percent of construction workers had at least one risk factor for on-the-job fatigue. If that sounds hard to believe, consider the following all make it more likely for a worker to become fatigued:

- Physically demanding labor, especially work including repetitive tasks
- Constant communications with fellow crew members about complex tasks
- Extended shifts of 10 hours or more
- Working 50 hours or more in a week
- Shifts at irregular times, including night or early morning work
- Having less than 12 hours to recover between shifts



This pretty much sums up the everyday life of a construction worker. According to the NSC 98 percent of construction workers said that fatigue was just part of the job.



# TOOLBOX TALKS

## Preventing Fatigue in Construction

Safety professionals need to first educate workers that fatigue leads to a greater risk of injury for them and coworkers, then find ways that both employers and workers can identify and prevent fatigue on the jobsite.

Here are some tips for employers:

- Arrange work schedules to provide sufficient rest opportunities
- Consider shorter night work schedules
- Limit the number of consecutive shifts of night work
- Require a minimum number of hours prior to reporting for the next shift after 10 hours or more
- Implement procedures to monitor and manage fatigue risks
- Train workers about the safety risks of fatigue and how to identify them
- Provide for a way for employees to report problematic work schedules

Workers:

- Use off time responsibility to ensure fitness for duty when on the job
- Follow any near-miss or other reporting policies in place at your employer
- Don't take on extra work that reduces opportunities for sleep when working long shifts
- Maintain a regular sleep schedule and aim to get at least seven hours of sleep each night
- During irregular shifts, set a four hour "anchor" time for sleep that doesn't change and supplement with naps
- Make changes to your sleeping area or adjust your household routine if possible
- Avoid caffeine and alcohol before sleep
- Look for early signs of fatigue in yourself and others

