

Hours of Work & Fatigue Management Guidelines

Version 1: 8/11/06



Work in the Australian pipeline industry may involve working in remote areas in difficult climates for shifts up to 12 hours over an extended roster pattern. In these conditions, it is particularly important to ensure that any risks associated with the hours of work and the fatigue that may result are identified and managed.

Fatigue within the workplace can be defined as being caused by physical or mental exertion or insufficient sleep that results in an individual's markedly reduced performance or reduced ability to or be able to carry out a task safely and effectively.

Because of the many work and non-work factors causing fatigue, management of fatigue at an operation is the responsibility of both the management and the employees and requires open cooperation for both management and training to identify and manage.

MANAGEMENT OF WORK HOURS

The responsible management of hours of work is one of the major proactive strategies available to manage the risk of fatigue within the workplace.

As part of the management of hours of work, operations should identify the hours of work arrangements for workers, supervisors and management.

The hours of work arrangements that need to be specified include:

- Number of consecutive shifts
- Maximum hours per shift, including travel time
- Maximum hours per roster cycle
- Start and finish times for a shift
- Minimum number of breaks and length of breaks within a shift
- Minimum break required between shifts

It is important to consider the requirements of individual operations, situations and workforces when determining hours of work arrangements.

ORGANISATION OF WORK

Additionally, consideration of the following factors and the likelihood of them affecting fatigue levels should assist in the management of fatigue:

- Identification of tasks critically affected by fatigue eg. driving, constant manual handling, working around equipment
- Effect of time of day on work performance
- Work environmental conditions eg. hot climate, difficult terrain
- Rotation of tasks according to the available skill base
- Flexibility of rest breaks or additional breaks

MANAGEMENT OF NON-WORK FACTORS

In many pipeline operations, accommodation and meals are provided for the workers in a camp. In these situations, good camp conditions and controls maximise the potential for adequate recovery sleep and assist in the management of non-work related factors.

Education and information should be available to assist workers in preparing to be fit for duty and to balance work and family commitments.

RECOGNITION OF FATIGUE

Reporting of fatigue needs to be supported by management policies and procedures. Some recognisable signs and symptoms of fatigue that can be noticed by an individual or in other workers include:

- Not feeling refreshed after sleep
- A greater tendency to fall asleep at work
- Increased errors
- Reduced performance and alertness
- Loss of concentration at work
- Blurred vision
- Difficulty in keeping eyes open
- Head nodding
- A drowsy relaxed feeling
- Micro sleeps

MANAGEMENT OF A FATIGUED WORKER

Employees who are identified as fatigued should be dealt with consistently and fairly. If an employee is fatigued, the supervisor should consider the following options:

- Allowing an appropriate fatigue break
- Allocation to other duties or equipment
- Allowing a nap if appropriate
- Not allowing the person to continue work

Similarly if an individual identifies that they are fatigued they should initiate any of these options and be trained in identification of fatigue and the options available.

RECORDKEEPING

It is necessary for each site to gather adequate data and information to:

- allow effective assessment of the risk of fatigue for that site resulting from the work and non-work factors associated with the current roster
- demonstrate that safety and health issues associated with hours of work are being managed

In addition to encouraging a culture of identification and reporting, types of data that may be of value include:

- Work hours and overtime data
- Accident and incident data including near misses. This needs to include the hours worked in previous days and within the current shift.
- Equipment damage data including near misses
- Causal analysis information that includes fatigue as a potential cause
- Skills base and task rotation practices
- Workforce demographics eg age, experience, travel times to and from work.

For more information contact APIA 02 6273 0577 or apia@apia.asn.au

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