

# HSE SAFETY

# CORNERSTONES

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## Protect Against Workplace Fatigue

In the United Kingdom, there are more than 3.5 million shift workers in a variety of industries, such as emergency services, healthcare, transport, manufacturing, entertainment and retail. However, when long working hours that do not allow for adequate rest and recovery are coupled with poorly designed shift-working arrangements, shift workers could experience fatigue. Like with any other hazard, fatigue needs to be properly managed or it could result in accidents, injuries and ill health. In fact, according to the HSE, fatigue-related work accidents cost the United Kingdom an estimated £115 to £240 million a year.

To ensure that your organisation's schedule arrangements allow your employees to get the necessary amount of sleep and provide workers with a safe working environment, follow these five guidelines:

- 1. Shift-work rosters.** Structure shifts so that work demands are highest toward the beginning and middle of a shift and decrease toward the end. In addition, avoid scheduling morning shifts that begin before 6 a.m.
- 2. Job demands.** Install fit-for-purpose plant, machinery and equipment, such as anti-fatigue mats, and encourage workers to report any concerns that they may have about work-related fatigue. In addition, develop a plan for potential situations where workers may have to unexpectedly work longer hours or additional shifts.
- 3. Environmental conditions.** Avoid scheduling shifts during periods of extreme temperature. In addition, provide a cool area where workers can take a break to rehydrate in hot work environments.
- 4. Non-work related factors.** Provide your workers with training on how to adequately manage fatigue both at home and at work. This should include detailing the risks associated with fatigue and how it relates to their health and safety duties.
- 5. Workplace fatigue policy.** Your workplace fatigue policy should at least include the following information:
  - The roles and responsibilities of supervisors and workers
  - Maximum shift length, average weekly hours and total hours over a three-month period
  - Control measures for specific tasks, jobs and operations
  - Self-assessment checklists
  - Procedures for reporting potential hazards and fatigue risks
  - Procedures for how to adequately manage fatigued workers—such as temporary task re-allocation

To supplement the five guidelines above, be sure to utilise the HSE's Fatigue Risk Index Calculator, which can assess each employee's risks and working patterns. The tool makes it possible to create shift schedules that minimise fatigue risks and can be found at:

[www.hse.gov.uk/research/rrhtm/rr446.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/research/rrhtm/rr446.htm).



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