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February 2016

SLEEP DEPRIVATION

Whether it's due to workloads, working side jobs for more income or after work activities the result is the same – many workers are arriving on the job overly-tired or sleep-deprived. Sleep deprivation or fatigue can affect a worker's manual dexterity, reaction time, and alertness. Worker fatigue or lack of sleep can affect judgment and safety. And worker aren't the only ones suffering the consequences of sleepiness on the job, it is costing employers money and, in some cases, putting the public's safety at risk.

Studies show that workers are not only getting less sleep than they should; they're getting less than they used to. The real danger arises when workers don't realize they're tired and go to work as if they were fine. Workers who try to function without enough sleep have a reduced ability to recognize or avoid risks. They have a slower reaction time and fail to make appropriate responses. Their quality and quantity of work is reduced. They have a poorer safety record and they contribute to higher workers' compensation costs.

Workers should take responsibility for getting enough rest. They should decide how much sleep they need to perform optimally. They should examine their off-work activities to see how they're impacting sleep. If they feel they haven't gotten enough sleep to function well at work, they should take a sick or vacation day to recuperate. During their work shift, they should notice when they lose concentration or start to nod off. When they find their attention wandering, they should get up and stretch or walk around or grab a quick snack. Casual chats may help maintain alertness and improve rather than detract from productivity. Since dehydration increases the effect of fatigue, workers should drink more water during the day.

Although workers' sleep habits are largely out of an employer's control or even influence, employers need to be aware of the effects of worker fatigue and make adjustments so that workers can do their jobs more safely and efficiently. Although there is no solution that will apply to all work situations, there are some simple things that employers or supervisors can do about sleep-deprivation on the job. Employers can educate workers on the effects of inadequate sleep and resulting fatigue. They can evaluate their work force and assign tasks to optimize performance and safety. Requiring work beyond a regular shift, if a worker is too tired, may increase the risk of accidents or injuries.

To insure a good night's sleep, the National Sleep Foundation suggests that individuals should exercise during the day, establish a regular sleep schedule, and relax before bedtime. Before going to sleep, they should avoid heavy meals or caffeine, consume less or avoid alcohol and nicotine, and drink fewer fluids that may disrupt sleep. The Foundation cautions that certain drugs or sleep aids can sometimes interfere with natural sleep.

Worker fatigue due to inadequate rest can affect more than the individual involved. It can have catastrophic safety or financial effects on co-workers, families, businesses, and even depending on the job, the general public. Workers need to get adequate sleep before going to work. They owe it to themselves and others.

Content Source: Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) (Users of Safety Talk are advised to determine the suitability of the information as it applies to local situations and work practices and its conformance with applicable laws and regulations.)

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