

Stay Awake, Stay Safe

**Courtesy of
State Compensation Insurance Fund**

With ever increasing economic, personal, and social demands being placed on people, we are doing more than ever on a daily basis. Keeping up such lifestyles can result in people feeling tired and deprived of sleep. The lack of sleep has the potential to affect health, judgment and safety on the job. Employers as well as employees must learn to recognize sleep deprivation and their responsibility for managing it.

The real danger arises when workers don't realize they're tired and go about their jobs as if they were fine. Workers who try to function without enough sleep are impatient, moody, and have a reduced ability to recognize or avoid risks. They have slower reaction time and fail to make appropriate responses. Their product quality and quantity is reduced. They have a poorer safety record and they contribute to higher workers' compensation costs.

Even though the sleep habits of workers are out of the employer's control, employers should be aware of the consequences of worker fatigue and take the steps so that workers can perform their tasks in a safe and efficient manner. Employers can educate workers on the safety effects of inadequate sleep and fatigue. They can evaluate their workforce and assign tasks to optimize performance and safety.

If workers show signs of fatigue, they should not be allowed to drive or operate certain machinery, nor should they be required to work beyond a regular shift.

Workers need to determine how much sleep is considered necessary for them to perform at their best. If they haven't been sleeping enough to function well at work, they should take a sick day or vacation day to recover. They should notice when they lose concentration or start to nod off. When they find their attention wandering, they should stop what they're doing, stretch or walk around, get a drink of water or grab a quick snack.

To insure a good night's sleep the National Sleep Association recommends that people establish a regular sleep and exercise schedule then relax before bedtime. Heavy meals and caffeine should be avoided, along with alcohol and nicotine as they may disrupt sleep. Certain sleep aids or drugs can also interfere with natural sleep.

Worker fatigue due to lack of rest can affect everyone, not just the individual involved. It can have catastrophic safety or financial effects on families, business or the general public. ••