

MAKE SHIFT WORK *SAFE* WORK

Most people in this country think of "work hours" as the daylight hours from 8 or so in the morning until 5 or so in the afternoon. But more than 20 million Americans work a different schedule. For many reasons, their work day either starts in the afternoon and ends late at night, or begins around midnight and ends in the early morning. If this applies to you, be aware that your safety is just as critical as the day crew, but that conditions and hazards may be different.

If you work a nonstandard shift, it may be because you need to care for family members during the day; you may have more than one job; it may be the best work you can get at the time; or you may simply prefer to work at night. Whatever the reason, you should realize that the potential for accidents and injuries tends to be significantly higher on night shifts than during the day.

Special Challenges Associated With Shift Work:

- The *type* of work may be different. Some companies schedule inherently heavy or more hazardous work at night when fewer people are around. This reduces risk for the many, but not necessarily for those on a graveyard or swing shift.
- It's more difficult to see in the dark. Artificial light can't illuminate every surface, which can result in more trips and falls. This also makes night driving more hazardous.
- Shift work may result in psychological problems for shift workers who fail to eat, rest and sleep adequately. Research indicates that shift workers may suffer depression, increased alcohol use, and even symptoms of physical illness.
- The potential for criminal behavior may increase the need for security by both the company and employees, since the cover of darkness is often used to help people commit crimes.
- Night workers who lack seniority for day shift assignments may be less experienced and less aware of safe work practices. This can make them more hazardous to themselves and others.

Fatigue - The Number One Shift Work Safety Problem

Your normal "body clock" wants you to be awake, alert, and productive during daytime. It can be hard to adjust to a different schedule than what your body naturally wants. People "off schedule," can feel tired and less alert. They are less likely to notice a potentially dangerous condition, or to respond quickly in an emergency. For example, more than 50,000 motor vehicle accidents per year are believed to be caused by sleepy drivers. Perhaps it's no coincidence that disasters like the Three Mile Island nuclear malfunction and the Exxon Valdez oil spill happened at night.

Tips For Dealing With Fatigue:

Engineering controls can help--such as improved lighting, ventilation, proper temperatures and noise control. But the key to dealing with fatigue lies with individual employees, who should:

- Keep a *regular* bedtime schedule. Your body can't adjust if you don't give it a chance.
- Keep your bedroom dark and quiet - have family or roommates cooperate with noise control.
- Avoid excessive use of alcohol, tobacco and caffeine--especially during the pre-sleep hours.
- If possible, try not to rotate shifts, which makes it more difficult for your body to adjust.
- Eat regular meals, but don't consume a heavy meal right before retiring--eat a light snack.
- Maintain a regular exercise routine, which improves sleep and helps reduce overall stress.
- Most important of all, get *enough* sleep for your own, personal body needs.

Stay alert during your shift, and go home safely -- *whatever* the time may be!