

Fatigue and Long Shifts

About 8 minutes to deliver

Nineteen hours awake impairs you about as much as being at the legal drink-drive limit, and the impaired person is the last to know.

Fatigue is not the same as being tired. It is a measurable loss of ability — reaction time, judgement, attention, and the thing that matters most on a jobsite: noticing that something has changed.

About seventeen hours awake impairs performance roughly like a blood alcohol of 0.05. Nineteen hours is closer to 0.08 — the legal limit. Nobody would let a colleague operate a machine after four drinks. We do it after a double shift without comment.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

- Rereading the same instruction, or reading a tape wrong twice.
- Doing the step out of order, or skipping one entirely and not knowing it.
- Microsleeps — two to thirty seconds of sleep with your eyes open. You do not know they happened. At 60 mph that is the length of a football field.
- Irritability, going quiet, or making a decision you would normally argue about.
- Standing there having forgotten what you came for.

The dangerous part: fatigue degrades your ability to judge your own fatigue. The people most impaired are the most confident they are fine.

WHERE THE RISK CONCENTRATES

- The last two hours of a long shift, and the drive home after it.
- Overnight, roughly 2am to 6am, and again in the early afternoon. Your body has a low point regardless of how much sleep you had.
- The first night of a night rotation, and the first day back on days.
- The fourth or fifth long day in a row. Sleep debt accumulates and does not clear with one good night.

WHAT ACTUALLY HELPS

- Sleep. Nothing else is a substitute. Seven to nine hours, and a dark, cool, quiet room in the daytime if you work nights.
- Caffeine works and then stops working. It masks fatigue for a couple of hours; it does not restore judgement, and it wears off suddenly.
- A twenty-minute nap in a break is genuinely effective. There is no shame in it.
- Move the task, not the person. If somebody is running on empty, put them on something that is not driving, working at height, or operating a machine.

WHAT WE DO HERE

- Tell me if you are running on nothing. Second jobs, a new baby, a sick relative, a long commute — I do not need the details, just the fact.
- Nobody drives home fighting to stay awake. Pull over, sleep, call. That call is never a problem.
- Speak up about a workmate too. Somebody who is fading will not spot it in themselves, and telling them is what a colleague does.

ASK THE CREW

- How many hours has everyone been up, and how long is the drive home?
- Who is on their fourth or fifth long day in a row?
- Is there a task today nobody should be doing tired — and who is on it?

29 CFR 1910.132 · 29 CFR 1926.20

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ATTENDANCE RECORD

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Date

Job / site

Delivered by

Company

#	Print name	Signature	Date
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I delivered this talk and determined it was suitable for this crew and this work.

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