

SAFETY DIRECTOR BULLETIN

FATIGUE IN THE WORKPLACE BEST PRACTICES

Fatigue isn't just feeling sleepy, it's a state of physical and mental weariness that undermines alertness, judgment, and reaction time. For workers, whether on road crews, in utilities, parks and recreation, public works garages, custodians, maintenance, or administrative offices, the consequences of fatigue can include:

- Reduced concentration, leading to costly errors
- Slower reaction times around moving equipment and traffic
- Impaired decision-making under pressure
- Increased risk of musculoskeletal injuries

Common Causes of Workplace Fatigue

- Extended Work Hours & Overtime
- Shift Work & Irregular Schedules
- Insufficient Rest Breaks
- Physical Demands (heavy lifting, repetitive tasks)
- Emotional Stress (public interactions, emergency response)
- Environmental Factors (extreme temperatures, noise)

Identifying Signs & Symptoms

- Persistent yawning or drooping eyelids
- Micro-sleeps (brief, unintended episodes of loss of attention)
- Headaches, dizziness, blurred vision
- Difficulty concentrating, forgetfulness
- Irritability, mood swings
- Slower response in emergencies



Prevention Strategies

- Optimize Shift Scheduling
 - Rotate shifts forward (morning → afternoon → night)
 - Limit consecutive night shifts to 2–3 days
- Enforce Adequate Breaks
 - 10–15 minute breaks every 2–3 hours on physically demanding tasks
 - 30-minute meal break on 8-hour shifts
- Promote [Sleep Hygiene](#)
 - Encourage 7–9 hours of sleep nightly
 - If working evenings or nights, make sure that sleep has occurred within the last 8 hours before going to work.
 - If napping before work, make sure that the duration is less than 45 minutes or greater than 2 hours to allow for a complete sleep/wake cycle.

- Physical Conditioning & Ergonomics
 - Stretching routines before and during shifts
 - Job rotation to reduce repetitive strain
- Nutrition & Hydration
 - Keep water accessible; avoid excess caffeine
 - Offer healthy snack options at the depot or garage
- Training & Awareness
 - Fatigue-risk management workshops
 - Supervisor checklists for spotting fatigued team members

Managing Fatigue Incidents

- Peer Intervention: Encourage co-workers to speak up if they notice signs of fatigue.
- Supervisor Response: Reassign duties, allow immediate rest, or send the employee home if necessary.
- Incident Reporting: Document any fatigue-related near-miss or accident to identify patterns.

Fatigue and Driving

[Maggie's Law](#), also known as the National Drowsy Driving Act, is a New Jersey law that imposes penalties on drivers who cause accidents while sleepy or tired. Specifically, any motorist who has gone without sleep for over 24 hours and caused a fatal accident can be charged with vehicular manslaughter, punishable by up to ten years in prison and a \$100,000 fine.

Resources

- [OSHA Worker Fatigue Resource Webpage](#)
- [CDC Workplace Fatigue Webpage](#)

Take Action

- Review your department's scheduling policies.
- Host a "Fatigue Awareness" toolbox talk this month.
- Audit your breakroom: Are there healthy snacks and hydration stations?
- Encourage employees to track their sleep patterns with simple logs or apps.

By including fatigue prevention within your broader safety culture, you'll protect your team's well-being, boost productivity, and foster a resilient workforce.