

## THE FATIGUE FACTOR

Most people look forward to “falling back” to standard time from daylight savings time, and taking back that hour of sleep we lost last spring. Is one hour enough to settle our sleep debt? Not for the majority of American workers who are operating on much less than the recommended eight hours of sleep per day.

Are you getting enough rest? This is an important question, because lack of sleep is more than a personal problem; it’s a matter of workplace safety. Fatigue has been identified as a factor in many of the injuries and fatalities that Americans suffer annually.

## SLEEP AND SAFETY

Your mind and body need rest to recover from the day’s stresses and prepare for the next. Most adults need eight hours of sleep per day. Failure to get adequate sleep can lead to a host of dangerous physical and mental problems that can put life and limb at risk, including, on the moderate end, slow reaction times and lack of focus, and on the extreme end, dozing off, road rage and hallucinations. Each day you deprive yourself of sleep, you build up a “sleep debt.” That debt may not become apparent right away. But, like other debts, it can accumulate until suddenly you find yourself in over your head, and become too tired to work safely.



## ARE YOU SHORT ON SLEEP?

Ask yourself two simple questions:

1. Can you wake up on time without an alarm?
2. Do you feel rested?

If not, you may be shortchanging yourself on sleep.

# SIGNS OF THE SLEEP DEPRIVED

Tired workers show a variety of safety-sapping symptoms, including:

- Slower reaction times
- Difficulty in processing or responding to what's happening around them
- Poor logic and judgment
- Difficulty focusing



Tired workers are less motivated and more forgetful. They have a greater tendency to take risks. Poor performance due to fatigue is more noticeable with repetitive tasks that take more than 30 minutes, or are complex and require close attention. Fatigued workers tend to rely on others to keep up and often compensate for poor concentration by checking and re-checking their own work. Some employees never even make it to work. Fatigue has been determined to be a factor in more than 100,000 vehicle crashes each year.

## TIPS FOR THE WEARY

Here are some tips for getting more sleep.

1. Go to bed and get up close to the same times every day. Staying up late and sleeping late on weekends can disrupt your regular sleep schedule.
2. Don't rely on drugs. Sleeping pills, alcohol, caffeine and other drugs should not be used to help you sleep or wake up. For a lot of people, these methods can actually cause sleeplessness and other problems. Avoid caffeine late in the day.
3. Get regular exercise to help you sleep and keep you fit to better fight fatigue.
4. If you're having trouble sleeping, try going for a short, brisk walk about an hour before bedtime.
5. If your work and sleep schedules differ from family and friends, discuss with them your need for rest. Make sure they know your sleep schedule so they are less likely to want to disturb you. Learn to say "no" to other activities when you need to sleep.
6. Make your room a "sleep zone." Minimize noise and light. This is especially important if you're a shift worker. If you have to sleep during the day, block light from windows completely and ask your family/friends for help in keeping the area quiet.
7. Eat earlier. Big meals at the wrong times can keep you uncomfortably awake when it's time to sleep, but drowsy when you need to be awake.

## Organizations should encourage their workers to make getting sufficient sleep a priority for both their own health and safety and that of others.

Employees must recognize the signs of fatigue and take the steps that will help protect them and coworkers from fatigue-related incidents. They should also be encouraged to talk with their physicians to rule out possible sleep disorders. Once employees understand the importance of getting more rest and take steps to do so, it can help them be less stressed, work more safely and be more productive.

### Resources:

- National Sleep Foundation
- Ted Morrison, Associate Editor, Bongarde Media
- National Safety Council

## CONTACT

For additional information, please contact:

### **Bob Lombard**

SVP & Regional Director  
Willis HRH Pooling Practice  
1755 E. Plumb Lane, Suite #269  
Reno, NV 89502  
775 323 1656 Ext. 19 (Office)  
775 858 6335 (Cell)  
lombard\_bj@willis.com

### **David F. Brawner**

AVP & Sr. Risk Control Consultant  
Willis HRH Pooling Practice  
26 Century Boulevard  
Nashville, TN 37214  
615 872 3536 (Office)  
615 587 1908 (Cell)  
dave.brawner@willis.com

