Workplace Fatigue – How To Manage It



Workers suffering from fatigue—physical and mental—are not only less productive and more prone to illness but also more distracted and thus more likely to be involved in a safety incident.

Fatigue can be broadly defined as a feeling of weariness, tiredness or lack of energy. Fatigue is a common complaint but, medically speaking, it's recognized more as a symptom or cause of other conditions than as a condition itself. The best way to understand fatigue is along a continuum. On one end of the spectrum is the fatigue that most of us occasionally experience in the course of our lives when we get physically or mentally overburdened. This kind of fatigue isn't serious and can usually be resolved simply and quickly, such as by getting extra rest. On the other end is a less common but more serious form of fatigue that's symptomatic of a more chronic and disabling condition, such as major depressive disorder or chronic fatigue syndrome. This form of fatigue is an acute and/or ongoing state of tiredness that leads to mental or physical exhaustion and prevents people from functioning as usual.

Everyone should be concerned about the impact of fatigue as it can be considered a form of impairment, making fatigue a Workplace Hazard. However, fatigue levels are not easily measured or quantified; therefore, it is difficult to isolate the effect of fatigue on incident and injury rates. Work-related factors may include long work hours, long hours of physical or mental activity, insufficient break time between shifts, changes to jobs or shift rotations, inadequate rest, excessive stress, having multiple jobs, or a combination of these factors.