

Fatigue Management

Today's toolbox talk is on Fatigue Management. In construction, we work long hours, often in demanding conditions, heat, heights, heavy equipment, and tight schedules. Fatigue isn't just "feeling tired." It's a state of mental or physical exhaustion that slows your reaction time, clouds your judgment, and increases the chance of serious injury or even fatality.

Fatigue is one of the hidden hazards on every job site. Studies show accident and injury rates jump significantly on evening and night shifts, and workers getting less than 5–6 hours of sleep face dramatically higher risks. We all have a role, workers and supervisors, in spotting and managing fatigue before it causes an incident.

What Is Fatigue?

Fatigue is more than drowsiness. It's when your body and mind can't perform at normal levels. It affects:

- Reaction time
- Decision-making
- Focus and memory
- Coordination and strength

Common Causes of Fatigue (in Construction)

- Long shifts, overtime, or irregular schedules
- Less than 7–8 hours of quality sleep
- Physically demanding work without enough breaks
- Heat, dehydration, or poor nutrition
- Stress (work or personal life), medications, or health issues
- Monotonous or repetitive tasks

Signs You (or a Coworker) May Be Fatigued

- Frequent yawning or heavy eyelids
- Irritability or mood swings
- Slowed reactions or clumsiness
- Trouble concentrating or forgetting steps

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- Headaches or dizziness
- Micro-sleep (brief moments of nodding off)

If you notice these in yourself or someone else, speak up immediately.

Why Fatigue Is Dangerous on a Construction Site

- Operating equipment, working at heights, or handling materials while fatigued is like driving drunk, your risk of error skyrockets.
- Common incidents linked to fatigue: falls, struck-by incidents, equipment rollovers, and poor judgment leading to near-misses.
- It affects the whole crew: one tired worker can put everyone at risk.

How We Manage Fatigue – Practical Steps

What YOU can do (Worker Responsibilities):

- Aim for 7–9 hours of sleep every night, set a consistent bedtime routine.
- Eat balanced meals and stay hydrated (especially in hot weather, dehydration worsens fatigue).
- Take scheduled breaks; even a short walk or power nap (if allowed) can help.
- Avoid caffeine as your only fix, it can mask fatigue and disrupt sleep later.
- Exercise regularly and manage stress.
- **Self-check before starting work:** “Am I fit for duty today?” If not, tell your supervisor, no shame, just safety.
- Report fatigue in yourself or others right away.

What the Company/Supervisors Will Do (Management Responsibilities):

- Monitor schedules to limit excessive overtime and allow recovery time.
- Rotate tasks and provide adequate breaks.
- Train everyone on fatigue risks and encourage open conversations.
- Maintain a work environment that supports alertness (proper lighting, ventilation, etc.).
- Follow a Fatigue Risk Management approach—treating fatigue like any other hazard.

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1. Have you ever felt fatigued on the job? What made it worse?
2. What's one change you can make this week to improve your sleep or energy?
3. How can we look out for each other on site?

Key Takeaways & Commitment

- Fatigue is preventable and manageable.
- Good sleep, hydration, breaks, and communication are your best defenses.
- Safety is a team effort, speak up if you're tired or see someone struggling.

Safety Meeting

