

# Safety 2019: Worker Fatigue, Incident Prevention and Well Being

Have you ever been so exhausted that it hurts?

Fatigue, which is a common issue among overworked Americans, is the root cause of an overwhelming number of preventable workplace injuries.

Phil La Duke, safety consultant and author, educated Safety 2019 attendees about what they can do to make workers aware about how lifestyle changes can improve sleep patterns and reduce fatigue.

“Scientifically, you can’t make up sleep,” he said. “This is where we really have to be influencers to our workers.”

In some cases, fatigue will become so severe that medical intervention is needed.

Incident rates skyrocket when fatigue is a factor, especially among those working long, 12-hour shifts or overnight. According to OSHA, accidents and injury rates are 30% greater during night shifts and workers on-the-job 12 hours per day show a 37% increased risk of injury.

Although safety professionals can’t mandate workers get sufficient rest, they can be influence and promote healthy lifestyle changes.

“There’s not much we can do in terms of practicality, but we can watch for symptoms and we can make them aware,” La Duke said.

Common symptoms of fatigue include headache, dizziness, sore or aching muscles, muscle weakness, slowed reflexes, impaired

decision making, moodiness, chronic tiredness, sleepiness, impaired hand-to-eye coordination, appetite loss, reduced immune system function, blurry vision, memory problems, poor concentration, hallucinations, reduced attention span and low motivation.

Safety professionals need to take initiative and instruct front line supervisors to pull workers off the floor who show signs of fatigue.

“If they’re not fit for work, we don’t want to put them to work. If you don’t do this, you’re going to have blood on your hands,” he cautioned. “You need to do something now because this is killing people.”

Creating awareness of a healthy lifestyle is the key to improving worker well being. Safety professionals should encourage exercising and taking longer, more-frequent breaks. La Duke also recommended campaigning for better eating options at the workplace. In addition, make it clear that physical fitness is a gradual change, not one that offers immediate results.

La Duke referenced countries across the globe that already have implemented governmental regulations in order to improve worker well being. The United States will soon join those countries as workers increasingly suffer the effects of burnout and fatigue.

“Too many people are breaking down to the point that they are being mentally and physically disabled,” La Duke said. “This is overwhelming our social security system.”

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