



Is Employee Fatigue the Greatest Problem We Face?

Publication

9.13.13

Safety Professionals do a fine job of determining the “root causes” or “contributing factors” of incidents in order to prevent the next accident. Executives might apply this analysis to employee performance issues.

Of necessity, employers often analyze performance and attitude problems from the standpoint of ensuring that a termination is legally defensible. Let’s shift our focus and try to determine the contributing factors to employee performance or judgment issues, and start with an often-overlooked contributing factor ... employee fatigue.

It goes without saying that sleep deprivation also affects the judgment and reflexes often required to work safely. Simple statistical analysis demonstrates that a disproportionate number of workplace injuries and fatalities occur on the last day of the week, often toward the end of the shift. We casually comment that workers were tired or distracted because it was the end of the workweek. But what do we do about this observation?

Why don’t employees get enough rest? Some reasons include working multiple jobs or ignorance about the effect of even modest under-sleeping. Many of us also have convinced ourselves that we are virtuous for “sacrificing” ourselves in order to complete needed tasks or to serve others or our organization.

We cannot necessarily address employees having to work more than one job, or the harsh demands of our ever-changing society. However, we can educate our employees and encourage rest, and perhaps consider such needs in our staffing and strategic decisions. As a wise old coach once told me, “rest is training”.

And finally, employers must consider the relationship of fatigue to the increasing prevalence of clinical depression among workers. EHS Today has run numerous articles and blog posts on the extent to which depression harms productivity.

The costs to health insurance from stress and depression-related disorders, loss of productivity, and use of short- and long-term disability leave alone justify focus on this increasingly common workplace issue ... and its correlation with fatigue and lack of sleep.

This article appeared on September 13, 2013 on *[Executive Street Blog](#)*.

Related People



Howard A. Mavity

Partner

404.240.4204

Email