

FATIGUE RISK MANAGEMENT

One of the least recognised causes of lacklustre corporate performance is the insidious impact of employee fatigue. Whilst fatigue is increasingly exposed as a critical factor in industrial accidents, particularly in several highly publicised transport fatalities, its negative contribution to everyday corporate performance and efficiency has only recently come under corporate scrutiny.

On May 6, 25 attendees from many corporate backgrounds including international icons, transport giants, port authorities, and emergency services participated in a highly informative presentation on fatigue risk management at an LAA seminar at Rydges Hotel, Rosehill. Discussion was led by Bob Bridges, CEO of InterDynamics Pty Ltd, fatigue risk specialists.

Bob informed participants that the clamour of society to "fix the fatigue problem" had led many organisations to become proactive about occupational fatigue. Awareness and training programs were developed to assist workers to better understand and manage their personal levels of fatigue, consultative committees formed to oversee fatigue management programs; "fatigue safe" rosters introduced and fatigue risk management policies and procedures drafted.

There has been a proliferation of research into the causes of workplace fatigue and its impact on the quality of decision-making and behaviour. Minimum requirements of OH&S legislation have been implemented. The list of responses by organisations and society to finding protection against the threats posed by fatigue is growing. Even with all this activity, company boards, legislators, regulators, and unions are increasingly asking, "Are our organisations fatigue safe? Are the actions we are taking sufficient to protect our people and our organisation against exposures to the significant losses which arise whenever there is an accident or incident which has fatigue as a contributing or root cause?"

Over the last decade an extensive body of research has confirmed that of all the factors that contribute to fatigue, the most significant factor is the amount and quality of sleep

that people achieve. With this knowledge, one of the leading forms of protection has been to educate workers on how they can better manage their sleep and fatigue. However, even with greater awareness of how to manage personal fatigue, fatigue cannot be eliminated. Hence, the challenge for organisations has been to protect them against fatigue risk at whatever level of fatigue experienced. For example, contingency plans are required for workers performing safety-critical tasks if health or family pressures lead to high levels of personal fatigue.

There is growing evidence that a commitment to just one or two forms of protection in isolation does not lead to a "fatigue safe organisation".

For high hazard industries such as transport, manufacturing, mining and healthcare, it is becoming clear that three levels of protection are required:

- Primary Protection achieved by developing fatigue safe work practices and rosters which significantly reduce task fatigue risks;
- Secondary Protection achieved by the development of competencies in managing fatigue risk at an operator and management level together with the use of systems to monitor compliance with minimum fatigue safety standards;
- Tertiary Protection achieved through competency based contingency and emergency plans to protect against unplanned situations where high levels of fatigue are experienced by individuals.

Insurers have long suspected that fatigue is a significant contributor to a large percentage of personal, third party, property damage loss/claims. Insurance underwriters are now asking their risk engineers to include risk gradings for fatigue in motor fleet risk assessments and other areas of commercial and industrial insurance.



Bob Bridges,
CEO InterDynamics

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