

news & notes

A HISTORY OF SHIFTS

In ancient days, people rose with the sun and slept at night. But our society is no longer solar-dependent, to say the least. In towns and cities across the country, all-night restaurants, grocery stores, and retail and service establishments light up the night sky.

Shiftwork is not a new phenomenon, although recognition of related safety and health effects is more recent. In the late 19th century, industrialists realized that they could maximize production and profits if they ran round-the-clock operations. This was especially true in businesses like steel-making, where stopping and starting was costly and inefficient.

In the early 1900s, Henry Ford used shiftwork to meet the rising demand for horseless carriages. During the First and Second World Wars, shiftwork fueled the fast-paced war production effort.

Today, at least 10,000 manufacturing plants work 24/7, as well as thousands of food, power production, health care, and call center operations. Representative of the change is the appearance of shiftwork consulting groups that assist businesses with issues like safety and productivity, and help them create schedules that enhance profitability while minimizing the toll on workers.



"Your supervisor says you were asleep on your shift from November to March."

EMPLOYEE SAFETY NEWSLETTER

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Shift Safety

What you need to know

Recent headlines about incidents of air controllers sleeping on the job prompted renewed interest in and concern about the subject of rotating shifts and worker fatigue. In past studies, over half of employees working late night or overnight shifts reported falling asleep on the job on a regular basis, almost two-thirds indicated they had seen poor performance operational errors by co-workers who were sleepy, and over half reported witnessing lax safety practices or accidents caused by worker fatigue.

It is not exaggeration to state that the main reason for shiftwork safety problems is fatigue.

For most people, their "body clocks," or circadian rhythms, tell them that daytime is the time to be alert, awake, and productive. So it can be very difficult to adjust to a schedule that is the opposite of what the human body naturally wants to do, especially so if the hours of work keep changing, as with air traffic controllers. This factor causes workers to be less likely to respond quickly and appropriately to emergencies.

Shiftworkers fighting sleep may even lapse into a trancelike state called automatic behavior syndrome, where their eyes are open, but they are not totally cognizant and alert. Night workers report co-workers "not seeing" that bins are filling, machines are jammed, or that they are walking into a wall!

Shiftworkers can avoid these hazards by taking these precautions:

1. Be aware of shiftwork safety and health hazards.
2. Get enough sleep before going to work so that you are alert, energized, and ready to work safely and productively.
3. Keep your work area well lit and well ventilated.
4. Keep the temperature at a comfortable level.
5. Work with and talk to co-workers when possible to help stay alert.
6. Use a radio when you work alone to stay alert and awake—as long as it doesn't disturb others.
7. Take scheduled work breaks to give you time to refresh yourself with a brisk walk, a nutritious snack, or a brief nap.
8. Get up and move around, stretch, or splash your face with cold water if you start to feel sleepy.
9. Don't operate dangerous machinery or drive if you're fighting sleep—tell your supervisor.
10. Eat nutritious, well-balanced meals at regular intervals to keep up your strength and energy levels.
11. Develop a regular exercise routine to help you keep fit and energized.
12. Always go to bed at the same time when you work shifts. Generally, it's best to go to bed as soon as possible after you come home from work.
13. Avoid eating a big or spicy meal, smoking, or drinking before going to bed.
14. Stop drinking caffeine 4 hours before bedtime, and avoid exercising in the 2 hours before you go to bed. It's best to exercise after waking up.
15. Keep your bedroom dark and quiet, and ask household members to respect your sleep time.

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EAT HEALTHY ON VACATION

For many vacationers, eating is a big part of their vacation enjoyment. **But you can maintain good eating habits on vacation and still have fun!**

The first step is to consider limiting your restaurant meals. If you're going to be vacationing in the same place for a week or more, **consider getting a room with kitchen facilities** so that you can bring in food and prepare your own meals.

If cooking and clean-up doesn't feel enough like a vacation to you, **follow these tips from <http://www.choosemyplate.gov/> for eating healthfully in restaurants:**

- **Order an appetizer** instead of a full meal
- **Order from the menu** instead of the "all you can eat" buffet.
- **Order water** or other unsweetened drinks with your meal.
- **Order a veggie-packed salad** to start your meal.
- **Go for steamed, grilled, or broiled dishes.**
- **Choose entrees that include vegetables.**
- **Ask for dressings, gravy, butter, etc., to be served "on the side."**



Confined Spaces Primer

Work safely in these tight spaces

Working in confined spaces can be a matter of life or death. Each year about 20 workers die in confined space-related accidents. Over half of the confined space-related injuries are sustained by other workers who are attempting to rescue a confined space entrant. OSHA defines a confined space as one that:

1. Is large enough and so configured that an employee can bodily enter it and perform assigned work.
2. Has limited or restricted means for entry or exit.
3. Is not designed for continuous employee occupancy.

The more dangerous confined spaces are called permit-required and must have at least one of these four characteristics:

1. A hazardous atmosphere such as being oxygen-deficient or toxic
2. A material that has the potential for engulfing an entrant
3. An internal shape that could trap or asphyxiate an entrant
4. Another recognized serious safety or health hazard

There are different roles with regard to permit-required confined spaces.

- **Entry supervisors** prepare the permit, authorize and oversee the work.
- **Authorized entrants** are assigned to work inside the confined space.
- **Attendants** stay outside the space to monitor the entrants.
- **Rescue and emergency teams** must be available and are permitted to enter the confined space itself to perform an emergency rescue.

Driving and Flooding Don't Mix

Drive safely in flooding weather

Many parts of the country are prone to flooding. Flooding events can happen at virtually anytime of year and have caused thousands of deaths over the last few decades. For this reason, drivers must exercise extreme caution or risk injury or death.

Flooding is a particularly dangerous road hazard. Safety experts say that flash floods are a major cause of weather-related highway deaths. You could lose control of your vehicle driving fast through as little as 2 inches of water on a roadway. Most vehicles will float in just 18 to 24 inches of water.

Furthermore, driving into deep water could soak your motor and cause your engine to stall. You could end up getting stuck and needing a tow.

Follow these precautions:

- **Never drive through floods.** Never try to drive through a flooded road. The water may be a lot deeper than it looks. Turn back and find another way to your destination. Be especially careful if you encounter water moving swiftly across the road. Stay well clear of running water as it can easily lift the vehicle and carry it along with the current.
- **Leave the car for higher ground.** If you do try to drive through floodwaters and get caught, leave your car immediately and move to higher ground. It's much better to lose your car than your life. Evacuating a vehicle during rising water can be very dangerous and has led to many deaths as persons were washed away with the current. So the safest advice bears repeating: "Never drive through floods."