

Toolbox Talks

National Sleep Awareness Week

Wake Up & Stay Safe: March 5-11 is National Sleep Awareness Week

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On Sunday, March 11, the beginning of daylight savings time, clocks will move forward an hour & everyone can enjoy additional sunlight at the end of the day. Unfortunately, this change also means that many sleep schedules will be affected – which can have health & safety consequences.

The transportation industry in particular faces serious safety concerns when lack of sleep is a factor. The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) is using the National Sleep Foundation's (NSF) National Sleep Awareness Week, held March 5-11, to remind transportation operators & the public to be aware of fatigue.

According to NSF's 2012 Sleep in America poll, nearly one-fourth of pilots & train operators admit that their performance is affected at least once a week by sleepiness. Moreover, one in five pilots acknowledge a serious error, & one in six train operators & truck drivers say that sleepiness has led to a near miss. "The results of the NSF poll should serve as a literal wake-up call," said NTSB Chairman Deborah A.P. Hersman. "Inadequate sleep puts lives at risk – we see this over & over in our accident investigations. Improving the quantity & quality of sleep can improve safety & ultimately save lives."

Sleepiness on the Move



Among all workers surveyed in the NSF poll, train operators & pilots reported the most workday sleep dissatisfaction. Almost two-thirds of train operators & one-half of pilots said they rarely or never get a good night's sleep on work nights, compared to 44% of truck drivers & 42% of non-transportation workers. Bus, taxi, & limo drivers reported the best work day sleep satisfaction, with about one-third saying they rarely or never get a good night's sleep on work nights.

"The margin of error in these professions is extremely small. Transportation professionals need to manage sleep to perform at their best," said David Cloud, NSF CEO. "As individuals & employers, we need to know more about how sleep improves performance."

The poll also showed that sleepiness played a role in car accidents commuting to & from work. Pilots & train operators significantly are more likely than non-transportation workers (6% each, compared to 1%) to say that they have been involved in a car accident due to sleepiness while commuting.

"While alcohol is often associated with impairment, operating a vehicle while fatigued can be just as deadly," said Hersman. "As we move the clocks forward an hour this weekend, transportation operators need to plan for adequate sleep on Sunday night & every other night to safeguard the traveling public."

All information found at www.safetytoolboxtalks.com

Advice for healthy sleep habits & fatigue prevention:

- Go to sleep & wake at the same time every day, & avoid spending more time in bed than needed.
- Get 7-8 hours of sleep before starting work.
- Use bright light to help manage your "body clock." Avoid bright light in the evening, & expose yourself to sunlight in the morning.
- Use your bedroom only for sleep to strengthen the association between your bed & sleep. It may help to remove work materials, computers, & televisions from your bedroom.
- Establish a relaxing bedtime ritual, like a warm bath or listening to calming music.
- Create an environment that is conducive to sleep. It should be quiet, dark, & cool with a comfortable mattress & pillows. (When trying to sleep during the daytime, use earplugs, soft music, or a fan to block out noise.)
- Take all scheduled work breaks. A snack or exercise during the break will refresh you.
- Save your worries for the daytime. If concerns come to mind, write them down so you can address those issues the next day.
- If you can't sleep, go into another room & do something relaxing until you feel tired.
- Exercise regularly, but avoid vigorous workouts close to bedtime. (Exercise will give you stamina & help you to fall asleep later.)
- Eat a well-balanced diet beginning the "day" with high protein foods & ending with carbohydrates. (Do not eat great quantities before bedtime; they may cause trouble sleeping.)
- Avoid caffeine, alcohol, & cigarettes. These substances cause sleep disturbances.
- If you are experiencing excessive daytime sleepiness, snoring, or "stop breathing" episodes in your sleep, contact your health care professional for a sleep apnea screening.
- If you're still struggling with sleep patterns & fatigue, see your doctor about sleep disorders, medications for illness, & using bright light on the job or during waking hours.



Random Fact:

According to two Michigan State University researchers, workplace accidents spike after daylight saving time changes every March. Christopher Barnes & David Wagner, both doctoral candidates studying industrial & organizational psychology, found in two separate studies that the March switch to daylight saving time resulted in 40 minutes less sleep for American workers, a 5.7% increase in workplace injuries & nearly 68% more work days lost to injuries. They found no significant increase in workplace accidents or sleep loss, however, when the clocks were set back an hour in November.

