Shift-Work Safety Checklist



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Any supervisor who works in a multiple-shift operation knows there are safety and health issues that go beyond those experienced in a daytime shift setting.

The following checklist from Circadian 24/7 Workforce Solutions can help you address some of those issues:

1. Periodically supervise a night shift. Doing so will give you more insight into practical ways to improve worker safety and wellness.
2. Evaluate the work environment. Conduct a top-to-bottom review of the workplace in search of factors that contribute to fatigue. A dimly lit workplace, poor airflow or temperatures above 70 F (21 C) all increase the odds of people nodding off. These conditions are often easily modifiable.
3. Put shift-work on the agenda. You probably already have a safety committee. Make sure overnight safety is part of its mandate, and that people who work night shifts have a seat at the table.
4. Teach workers about sleep and napping. Getting enough off-duty sleep is the most effective way to maintain alertness. You can't force workers to sleep, but you can teach them about sleep's fundamental importance, explain the mechanics of sleep stages, and give them tips on how to get quality daytime sleep and make the most of pre-work naps.
5. Permit several short breaks. Many night shift jobs require people to do the same task for long stretches, and this monotony often sets the stage for alertness lapses. Along with one 25 to 35-minute break per shift, people working through the overnight hours should get a 10 to 15-minute break every two or three hours.
6. Assess your schedule. No shift-work schedule is perfect, but some are particularly harsh. Schedules that require workers to rotate backward (i.e., to go from nights to evenings to days) or work five or more consecutive 12-hour shifts can exacerbate fatigue levels.
7. Monitor overtime. People are more likely to make mistakes when they've accumulated a "sleep debt" from several days of insufficient sleep. This is a common result of excessive overtime. Keep an eye on overall overtime levels, including a breakdown of day-versus-night overtime hours and identify individual "overtime hogs" who accrue large amounts of extra hours.
8. Standardize shift change procedures. A large proportion of injury incidents occur during shift changes because of the higher human traffic and potential for miscommunication. Make sure you have procedures in place that ensure a smooth transition.
9. Watch out for "The Wall." Because of a dip in circadian rhythms, the hours

between 4 and 6 a.m. are generally the hardest and riskiest hours of the night. Exercise has been shown to boost alertness, so set up an exercise bike or treadmill which interested workers can use for a mini-workout.

10. Don’t forget the drive home. Because of the elevated risk of falling asleep at the wheel, the post-shift commute home is the most dangerous part of a shift worker’s day. Consider providing workers a quiet room in which to take a nap before heading home.
11. Provide shift-work lifestyle training. Whether it’s handing out literature about the health and safety challenges of shift-work or holding live-training sessions on managing a shift-work lifestyle, it’s always wise to provide your shift-workers with information. This shows them that you understand the special challenges they deal with and it can also be a real benefit to your bottom line by reducing absenteeism and turnover.