

BULLETIN

## Rotational shiftwork linked to fatigue

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*Too tired to work? WorkSafeBC Regulation can provide relief*



**espite** well-documented risks, alternating or rotational shiftwork remains a significant part of many HSA members work schedules.

This is exacerbated by staffing shortages, resulting in an increase in extra and extended shifts, as well as constantly changing schedules that cycle from days, afternoons, nights, and overnight.

As cited by the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety, "interest in the effects of shiftwork on people has developed because many experts have blamed rotating shifts for the "human error connected with nuclear power plant incidents, air crashes, and other catastrophic accidents."

Because HSA members are entrusted with critical health care and social services procedures affecting the health and lives of patients and clients, battling the strain of irregular scheduling is of ongoing concern.

"Many workers find that shiftwork disrupts their family and personal life and leads to health problems including chronic fatigue and gastrointestinal disorders," notes CCOHS. "Scientific studies throughout the world have shown that shiftwork, by its very nature, is a major factor in the health and safety of workers.

"A shiftworker, particularly one who works nights, must function on a schedule that is not natural," according to CCOHS, which can:

- upset ones circadian rhythm (24-hour body cycle),
- cause sleep deprivation and disorders of the gastrointestinal and cardiovascular systems,
- make existing disorders worse, and
- disrupt family and social life.

HSA continues in a variety of lobbying initiatives to improve awareness and alleviate problems encountered by members working rotational shifts.

To stave off the effects, you can maintain a healthy diet, and do your best to establish effective transitional sleep patterns. But what if one day you know you just cant function at work because of accumulated fatigue?

If you are too fatigued to perform your work safely, inform your supervisor.

WorkSafeBC Regulation 4.20 "Addressing Impairment in the Workplace" states that workers and employers must consider "fatigue" as a potential source of impairment ... among other concerns ... thus causing risk of

injury to workers and/or clients.

WorkSafeBC also states in Regulation 4.19 [1] that a worker -must not knowingly do work where the impairment may create an undue risk to the worker or anyone else." Nor can an employer assign a worker to duties where such impairment may create an undue risk.

If you feel you must remove yourself from work under these circumstances, the reasons must be clearly enunciated to your supervisor ... and your union steward should be notified immediately.

As this action would be taken under provisions of the Workers Compensation Act, no discriminatory action can be taken by your employer. HSA is in the process of producing an information package for all stewards with details on this legislation pertaining to impairment due to fatigue.

As well, the union is urging that the effects of rotational shiftwork be placed on the agenda for joint occupational health and safety meetings at all HSA workplaces. 

*Contact your steward or HSAs Occupational Health and Safety Officer for more information.*

**For more detailed research and information on the effects of rotation shiftwork, see Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety:**  
[www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/work\\_schedules/shiftwrk.html](http://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/work_schedules/shiftwrk.html)

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