

# Road freight transport industry

## Driver fatigue

Fatigue is a common problem in both short and long distance truck driving. It affects driver performance including the amount of effort required to maintain concentration on the driving task.

Working long hours, working at night, working irregular hours, and early starting times are common work practices when transporting freight by road. Some truck drivers report working more than 12 hours per day. These work practices contribute to cumulative fatigue.

Most prominent health effects resulting from working at night and working long hours are coronary heart disease and gastrointestinal diseases. Commonly reported symptoms include:

- sleep disruption
- gastro-intestinal discomfort
- disturbances of appetite
- dizziness
- psychological symptoms such as sleepiness, persisting fatigue, anxiety, irritability, mild depression, and mood disturbances.

Drivers working long hours and working night shifts often average between one and four hours less sleep than that of permanent day workers. Complaints may include:

- difficulties in falling asleep and remaining asleep
- being disturbed by noise during sleep
- not feeling refreshed after sleep
- greater tendency to fall asleep while at work
- more frequent naps during leisure hours
- extended sleep during days off
- self reports of fatigue/sleepiness

**BEWARE:** You are most likely to fall asleep while driving between 3.00 am and 6.00 am. Other critical times during the day are around 4.00 pm and 10.00 pm. Driver errors increase with increasing driving time. Driver performance can deteriorate as early as three hours into the trip.

There are a number of ways for drivers to ensure that they get enough sleep including:

- reducing light levels in the day-time by using dark curtains with backing or blinds
- reduce interruptions e.g. turn off mobile phone, get an answering machine, agreements with family members
- sleeping in cool conditions
- use 'white' noise to screen out sounds e.g. air-conditioner, fan
- reducing noise levels by using heavy curtains and sound insulation on doors and windows.

Work rostering assigns drivers to various trips within a specified time. Rosterer may involve several trips. Work scheduling involves organising and coordinating work rosters. Work rosters should be organised by considering a range of factors including:

- the suitability of the driver to the task (competence/ability etc)
- working environment
- workforce characteristics
- driver preference
- available facilities
- nature of the work.

Employers have to develop safe work procedures for their workers. These include:

- realistic trip schedules and driver rosters, i.e. scheduling practices should not at any time put the delivery of a load before a driver's health or safety
- a driver should not be required to drive unreasonable distances without advance notice, sufficient time for the trip and adequate rest
- arrange a driver's roster and workload to maximise the opportunity for a driver to recover from the effects or onset of fatigue
- provide adequate arrangements for rest and recovery at the depot or elsewhere
- provide alternative courses of action to include any additional procedures the driver can implement due to unexpected demands (i.e. extra time for resting or recovering if the driver has been delayed).

Ideally, work schedules should be flexible, organised as far in advance as possible and allow drivers opportunities to swap shifts. Work scheduling should not be left only to managers and occupational health experts. Drivers should be involved in developing their own rosters.

Due to the negative health effects of night work and working long hours, business operations should minimise the amount of shiftwork and night work. Any health effects arising from night work and working long hours should also be monitored and action taken where necessary. Regardless of rosters or schedules that have been developed, business operators must empower drivers to pull over and rest if too fatigued to drive the vehicle safely.

Driver fatigue arises not only from hours spent at the wheel but also from unexpected demands. One of these is excessive queuing time delivery drivers may experience before delivering goods. At all times there should be open and well established communication lines. The following are suggestions to prevent or minimise driver fatigue by informing the driver of:

- any delays that are likely to occur
- any plans that may be implemented to reduce fatigue
- rest facilities that are available at the depot that may be used while waiting to unload.

Reducing excessive queuing at depots ultimately depends upon managers, contractors and drivers understanding and fulfilling their individual workplace health and safety obligations.

For more information on driver fatigue and other workplace health and safety issues visit [www.dir.qld.gov.au](http://www.dir.qld.gov.au)

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