



Hours and fatigue

organising and health & safety

What are shift work and extended working hours?

Shift work and extended working hours can best be described as work performed outside normal day hours.

'Work within day hours' means

- a work day usually completed within a spread of hours starting at or after 7 am and finishing before 7 pm between Monday and Friday
- working time consisting of no more than 8 hours per day and 40 hours or less per week (excluding overtime)
- hours worked as a continuous on-duty period, except for the normal meal and rest breaks.

What are the employers' responsibilities?

Employers must

- consult with employees and OHS representatives
- provide adequate and appropriate information, training, instruction and supervision
- identify, assess and control hazards associated with working hours
- provide an appropriate physical and organisational environment
- provide healthy and safe workplaces and work systems, including working hours.

Organising to prevent injury and disease from working hours and fatigue

Workers should

- meet to discuss causes and effects of and possible solutions to injury and disease caused by working hours – see *ACTU Health and Safety Guidelines for Shift Work and Extended Working Hours* at <http://www.actu.asn.au/public/papers/shift.html>
- collectively determine how to achieve a healthy and safe workplace.

Your health and safety representative and committee, or your union delegate, should be involved.

Health and safety representatives and union delegates should

- ensure that all workers know that they have the right to refuse work that is likely to endanger them
- collect evidence of any health and safety problem – for example, talk to workers, do a survey
- meet with the employer
- seek control of hazards at source
- develop a prevention policy in consultation with workers and management
- include working hours in enterprise agreements
- contact the union or OHS inspectors if necessary.

If an employer will not act on health and safety issues, OHS representatives in some states and territories can issue provisional improvement notices (PINs). These are official notices to an employer that a health and safety issue exists and needs to be fixed.

Health and safety inspectors can direct employers to fix problems in the workplace and may issue prohibition or improvement notices.

Risks associated with shift work and extended hours

Does your employer address

- the need for adequate and regular rest periods between and during shifts
- the particular hazards of extended and night shifts?

Does your employer control the risks associated with shift work and extended hours through

- consultation with employees and unions in the design of rosters
- formulation of rosters that do not result in excessive working hours, inadequate rest breaks and/or inadequate breaks between shifts
- expert advice on the effects of the work environment and working hours

Hours and Fatigue

- consideration of occupational exposure to noise, chemicals, temperatures and manual handling hazards?

Extended working hours and fatigue

Do extended working hours lead to reduced sleep, with increased levels of fatigue and increased risk of accidental injury?

Causes of fatigue

Is fatigue caused by

- the workload imposed by a job
- the length of shift
- previous hours and days worked
- the time of day or night?

Do jobs that require standing for lengthy periods, frequent manual handling or repetitive movements, or are otherwise physically demanding lead to increased fatigue on long shifts or shifts with overtime?

Does monotonous work or work where a high level of attention and alertness is required increase fatigue?

Results of fatigue

Does fatigue-related impairment cause delays in response and reaction times, impaired reasoning, reduced vigilance and impaired hand-eye coordination?

Do levels of fatigue lead to

- higher sick leave
- higher accident rates, both at work and while travelling between work and home
- increased use of medical facilities?

How are extended working hours hazardous?

Do long hours of work result in you suffering

- an increase in alcohol consumption
- an increase in smoking
- an increase in caffeine consumption
- unhealthy weight gain

- disrupted eating and sleeping patterns
- gastrointestinal disorders
- cardiovascular problems, including high blood pressure and heart attacks
- pregnancy issues, including infertility, miscarriages and negative birth characteristics
- adverse psychological effects, in particular work stress, burnout and depression
- an increase in family discord
- an increase in the rate of relationship breakdowns
- a decrease in the amount of time parents spend with their children
- adverse behavioural effects in children, particularly in adolescents?

Exposure to other health and safety hazards

Extended hours may increase exposure to other OHS hazards, such as chemicals, noise and manual handling.

Any increase in daily or weekly hours will require a lowering of the average hourly level of exposure to the hazard. Chemicals, for example, take various times to be eliminated from the body, so breaks between shifts must be long enough to allow this to occur before there is further exposure.

Manual handling hazards may be increased by extended shifts due to the cumulative effects of muscular fatigue and the need for adequate recovery from fatigue and any sprains or strains incurred.

AIRC Test Case Decision

The Australian Industrial Relations Commission (AIRC) *Working Hours Case Decision* of July 2002 provided a test case standard that confers a right for an employee to refuse to work overtime that would result in any risk to employee health and safety.