

# Preventing driver fatigue: A guide for supervisors and dispatchers

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Manager, Information  
NZ Transport Agency  
Private Bag 6995  
Wellington 6141

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If you have further queries, call our contact centre on 0800 699 000 or write to us:

NZ Transport Agency  
Private Bag 6995  
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## Introduction

Despite being identified as a contributing factor in many fatal motor vehicle crashes, driver fatigue continues to be referred to as the 'hidden killer'. To many, fatigue is invisible and appears without warning. However, because we can identify fatigue by a number of recognisable indicators we are well placed to be proactive and take the decisive measures needed to avoid disaster.

Driver fatigue can result in loss of alertness, hazardous driving and, at its most extreme, falling asleep at the wheel. It is established fact that the driving performance of a fatigued driver will deteriorate well before the driver falls asleep at the wheel.

As a supervisor or dispatcher you have an obligation to the driver, their family, the company and the wider community to ensure that you do not send a fatigued driver onto the road or create a work environment that could result in driver fatigue.

## Outcomes

When you have read this guide you will have an understanding of:

- your responsibilities for preventing driver fatigue
- the links between driver fatigue and workplace health and safety practice and obligations
- duty of care and chain of responsibility
- the principles of scheduling and rostering to better manage driver fatigue
- the appropriate countermeasures that can be used to combat the effects of driver fatigue
- managing drivers and training.

Use this guide as an ongoing resource to assist you in preventing driver fatigue.

## Recommended reading

Before reading this guide it is recommend that you:

1. read the NZ Transport Agency's publication *Fatigue: the hidden killer* and complete the self-assessment questions, and
2. read the NZ Transport Agency's: *Preventing fatigue in the commercial road transport industry: A good practice guide*, and
3. acquaint yourself with your responsibilities for workplace health and safety as detailed in your organisation's workplace health and safety policy and procedures.

NZ Transport Agency publications are available from:

<http://www.nzta.govt.nz/resources/commercial-toolkit/fatigue.html>.

## Your responsibilities

Owners, managers, supervisors and dispatchers of any road transport business have a moral and legal responsibility to manage the work environment in such a way that driver fatigue does not become a factor in workplace accidents and incidents. These accidents and incidents include vehicle crashes that can range from minor vehicle damage (a clipped outside mirror), through major damage to vehicles or property, to serious injury and even death.

Driver fatigue is recognised as a significant hazard in the workplace and, like any workplace hazard, the first priority must be to eliminate it. If this cannot be done then isolation or minimisation must follow; you cannot ignore it.

Everybody in the supply chain from managers to dispatchers and drivers, has a responsibility to ensure no driver is allowed to drive while fatigued.

## Fatigue and workplace health and safety

The Health and Safety in Employment Act 1992 (HSE) requires employers to manage hazards in the workplace. Under the HSE, employers are required to identify, eliminate, isolate or minimise hazards. Fatigue is one of the hazards that employers are required to manage. Commercial vehicles come under the definition of a 'workplace'.

Although the primary responsibility for maintaining a safe and healthy workplace belongs to the employer, employees and contract drivers also have a responsibility to manage hazards. In the case of drivers this means taking responsibility for being rested and managing their sleep and rest in such a way that they are safe to drive.

Operators and drivers with general questions about the HSE and its application should visit the Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Service website at [www.osh.dol.govt.nz](http://www.osh.dol.govt.nz) or call 0800 209 020.

## Duty of care

Common law has established that every person has a duty of care to others.

In the workplace environment, duty of care means that all people will pay constant attention to, and be aware of, the possible consequences of their actions. Taking this one step further, as a supervisor or dispatcher you must be aware of the causes of fatigue, it's affect on drivers and the consequences of having a fatigued driver on the road.

## Chain of responsibility

Traditionally drivers and operators have been the focus of compliance enforcement authorities, but breaches are often caused or influenced by the actions of others. Chain of responsibility recognises that all the people who influence driver behaviour and compliance must be held accountable. This includes directors of companies.

Under chain of responsibility, responsibility is shared; it is not transferred. The links in the chain of responsibility for each trip can potentially include the:

- consignor
- operator
- packer
- loader
- scheduler
- dispatcher
- driver
- receiver.

Under chain of responsibility anyone who causes or influences a driver to do the following could be held responsible and, upon conviction, fined up to \$25,000:

- Exceed speed limits.
- Work outside work time limits.
- Exceed maximum gross weight limits.
- Skip or cut short rest times or fail to complete accurate logbook entries.

## Working within the prescribed work time hours

Because activities both inside and outside the workplace contribute to driver fatigue, working within the prescribed work time hours alone is not a guarantee against being fatigued and therefore unfit to drive.

Supervisors and dispatchers must be ever vigilant when managing drivers to observe any of the warning signs exhibited by a fatigued driver.

## Scheduling and rostering

Scheduling and rostering is about planning the way in which your business will operate.

Without proper planning it is possible to burn drivers out and not be aware of it. It is crucial therefore that everybody involved in the scheduling and rostering of drivers has a thorough understanding of the demands that are, or are likely to be, placed on drivers.

Whilst careful planning of driver schedules and rosters may appear to be a waste of time, failure to do so will inevitably result in increased costs, non-compliance and even destroy the reputation and viability of a business.

### Scheduling

Scheduling is the planning and commitment of resources to make something happen at a defined time. Scheduling can relate to a single trip or a number of trips or events.

### Planning a schedule

Careful planning of schedules that take in consideration the factors that cause fatigue can dramatically reduce the risk to the driver and the company of a driver driving whilst they are fatigued.

By identifying and managing the issues that contribute to driver fatigue it is possible to reduce the overall risk of fatigue related accidents and incidents.

People who are fatigued:

- consistently under perform
- make more errors
- make poor decisions
- are more likely to be affected by stress, and
- are more likely to overreact to an unusual or unforeseen event.

It makes good business sense to plan schedules that reduce the fatigue risk.

Schedules must be legal and safe, not only for your drivers but also for other road users. They must provide an environment that encourages drivers to perform well. Schedules that require drivers to exceed the speed limit or exceed work time, are unacceptable at any time, and have no part in a well managed and compliant road transport operation.

When planning a schedule a number of factors must be taken into consideration. These factors include:

- time for vehicle and personal safety checks
- the requirements of the transport task: type of load, loading and unloading, load securing and documentation requirements
- the length of the trip: travel time + loading/unloading time + required rest breaks + delaying factors (road works, weather etc)
- demands and inefficiencies of freight forwarders and receivers, particularly delays in loading/unloading and unavailability of equipment, eg a forklift
- consideration of the time of the day, eg traffic congestion or driving at times of the day when the fatigue risk is at its greatest
- sufficient time is provided for required rest stops and short 'comfort' stops in between
- a trip plan that is not too rigid so as to leave the driver with no need to think for themselves and take some responsibility for their actions
- consultation with drivers and/or their representatives.

## Assessing a schedule

All driver schedules should be assessed regularly to ensure they represent best practice fatigue prevention. This is not a difficult task if you follow a few simple steps:

- Use a checklist. (sample checklists are provided in the nzta best practice guide to managing fatigue in the commercial road transport industry<sup>1</sup>).
- Develop a process for assessing driver schedules.
- Be methodical: follow the same process every time.
- Be conservative – don't be tempted to underestimate the length of time it takes to complete a task. It is far better for good practice fatigue management to overestimate the time required to complete a task than to underestimate and put additional pressure on drivers.
- Document your process, methods used and basis for your decisions, ie make sure you keep records. (see section of documentation and records).

<sup>1</sup> This guide is available from the NZ Transport Agency.

- Review schedules to ensure drivers can work within the prescribed legal requirements.

If using a new or infrequently run schedule, it is sensible to roster a driver who understands the legal requirements around working hours, is trained in the recognition of fatigue warning signs and has demonstrated an ability to manage their own fatigue. Feedback from the driver should be sought and acted on prior to having any further drivers complete this work.

## Rostering

Rostering is the process of allocating staff in order to make a schedule work efficiently over a period of time.

Key points to be considered when preparing a roster include:

- the period of time a roster will cover, eg week, fortnight, month
- the tasks that need to be covered during the period of the roster and any constraints that may be placed on performing these tasks, for example set pick-up or delivery times
- opportunities for drivers to minimise the onset of fatigue
- opportunities for drivers to have night time sleep
- opportunities for drivers to minimise the build up of sleep debt and to repay any accumulated sleep debt.

A well planned roster will take into account a driver's body clock (circadian rhythm) and the need for sleep and provide:

- a balance between drivers work and non-work time
- opportunities for a minimum of 6–7 hours continuous sleep each day. (This is included in the minimum 10 hour rest break required by law which, by necessity, has to include other activities, for example getting to and from work)
- adequate opportunities to adjust to new shifts when transiting from a day to a night shift or vice versa. The golden rule should always be to move start times forward not backwards
- opportunities for sleep in familiar surroundings whenever possible
- start times that do not prevent the driver from being able to sleep between midnight to 6am; the time period when the driving risk is at its greatest.

## Night driving

If a schedule requires driving through the night the roster should be arranged to ensure:

- the driver is adequately rested before they start work
- time is made available to allow for extra refresher breaks
- night driving duties are only allocated to drivers who have received driver fatigue training and who are prepared to work nights
- drivers can get day sleep in an environment that assists quality sleep, (quiet, cool and dark)
- additional time is allowed to recovery sleep if any work occurs between midnight and 6am, the hours when the fatigue risk is the greatest.

## Providing feedback

Whenever driver schedules or rosters are being developed, it is vital to discuss your proposed plans with the drivers concerned. Doing this achieves buy-in from the drivers at an early stage and can often identify a potential



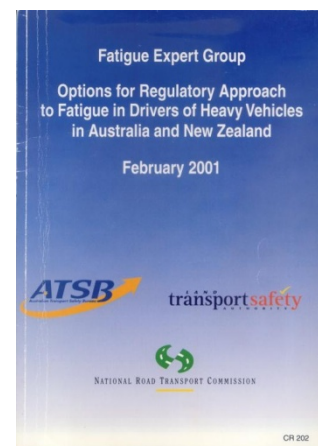
problem that had earlier been overlooked. This may save money and possibly eliminate a potential embarrassment later on.

## Leave, holidays and sickness

When planning a roster, provision must be made to cover annual leave and sick leave. Two periods of two weeks annual holiday are more conducive to good practice fatigue management than one longer period or several short periods

From time to time it may become necessary to allow drivers to take leave at very short notice, for example sick or bereavement leave. Plans must be developed therefore to accommodate this without placing unrealistic demands on other drivers.

If a driver is unwell and they feel they would not be able to perform their duties safely then duty-of-care becomes a factor. If a driver tells you that they feel they could be a safety risk to themselves or other road users then supervisors and dispatchers have a duty-of-care to take appropriate action to minimise the risk. The actions taken in these cases may include sending the driver home to rest, reallocating the drivers duties for that day or recommending that the driver has a medical check up. The options and process for dealing with these situations should be set out in the company policies and be well communicated to all staff.



## Countermeasures

Countermeasures are actions that help a driver maintain their alertness and avoid the problems that come with fatigue. The actions might be initiated by the driver themselves or actions imposed by regulations or company policy. The work time and log book rule is an example of an imposed countermeasure designed to lessen the potential for a driver to drive whilst fatigued. Further information can be found in the report *Options for regulatory approach to fatigue in drivers of heavy vehicles in Australia and New Zealand* which can be downloaded from <http://www.ntc.gov.au/filemedia/Reports/FatigueExpertGroupRepFeb2001.pdf>.

## Managing drivers

It is beyond the scope of this guide to detail good driver management practices. However, there are some key points that supervisors and dispatchers need to be aware of. These include:

- Recognising and managing drivers is not easy – each driver has different needs and personalities.
- Drivers, be they employees or owner drivers, can make or break a business.
- There is a shortage of quality drivers which means a driver can leave your employment and go and work for an opposition operator. Therefore you must ensure that you treat your drivers with respect and understanding. Above all you must avoid any verbal abuse or giving any indication that your drivers are not valued in your organisation.
- Although transporting freight makes money for the business you need drivers in order to do this.
- Drivers are often the only face-to-face contact your clients will have with your business.

## Good driver management is about good communication

- Drivers must be made to be a part of your organisation and share in its success and failures.
- Drivers need to know how they are contributing to the organisation's business; the use of annual appraisals is one way to do this. These also give you the opportunity to reinforce company rules, policies and operating procedures.
- Don't wait until something goes wrong before you sit down with your drivers and discuss their work with them. Proactive management is far more effective than reactive.
- Often the most effective form of driver management is getting to know the driver, what makes them tick and what motivates them. Once you have done this it will quickly become obvious to you if something is wrong; the way they look, the way they speak or a change in normal behaviour.

## Training

Adequate driver training is not only good business sense, it is a legal requirement. This is particularly important in relation to fatigue prevention, health and safety requirements and legal compliance; for example vehicle safety and work time rules.

Drivers must be fully briefed on company policy and procedures and the part the driver plays in ensuring their effectiveness. Processes need to be in place so that if anyone feels a policy or procedure is not working or they identify an opportunity for improvement, it is clear how they can progress the issue.

Driver training also involves having a programme in place to provide refresher training and to reinforce the fatigue and safe driving messages. Ongoing re-enforcement can be achieved by placement of posters, use of in-house newsletters and safety briefings.

## Documentation and records

Documentation and records show what you do, how you go about doing it and most importantly what you did. They can provide a valuable record and evidence that you are meeting your compliance, health and safety and duty-of-care obligations.

Best practice fatigue prevention includes keeping records of:

- driver scheduling and rostering
- driver licenses and endorsements, (Use of Drivercheck or TORO can assist here<sup>2</sup>)
- operational policy and procedures which includes documented responsibilities for managers, supervisors, dispatchers and drivers
- driver fitness for duty and medical standards
- driver training including driver fatigue training
- work time monitoring and review process e.g. comparison of rosters and schedules with work time logbooks, timesheets and pay records
- internal review processes

<sup>2</sup> For advice about Drivercheck and TORO contact the NZ Transport Agency 0800 699 000.

- management and correction of non-compliances
- investigation carried out following any incident or accident where fatigue may have been a contributing factor
- actions taken following an accident investigation.

## Summary

- As a driver supervisor or dispatcher you have a responsibility to ensure that you do not send a fatigued driver onto the road or create a work environment that could result in driver fatigue.
- The action or inaction of a supervisor or dispatcher must not become a direct contributor to an incident, near miss or a crash.
- Duty of care means that all people will pay constant attention to, and be aware of the possible consequences of their actions.
- Chain of responsibility recognises that all the people who influence driver behaviour and compliance should, and must, be held accountable. Under the chain of responsibility, responsibility is shared; it is not transferred.
- Working within the prescribed work time hours does not mean that drivers are not too fatigued to drive.
- Careful planning of schedules can dramatically reduce the risk to the driver and the company of a driver working whilst they are fatigued.
- Rostering is the process of allocating staff in order to make a schedule work efficiently over a period of time.
- A well planned roster will take into account a driver's body clock (circadian rhythm) and the need to sleep.
- Good driver management practice and best practice fatigue management go hand-in-hand.
- Documentation and records assist you to keep control of the business. They help you to plan better and can be used in an investigation if something goes wrong.