Working Safely During Shift Work

Shift work – Outside the Usual 8-Hour Day
While there are many variations of shift work, in this talk shift work refers to systems in which employees work outside the usual eight-hour day, and may start their shifts in the morning, afternoon or night.

Extended or longer shifts, for example 12-hour shifts, compress a working week into three or four days, but allow longer periods of free time.

Daily exposure to noise, chemicals and physical hazards may be increased. As workplace exposure standards are based on 8-hour shifts and not on extended shifts, professional advice should be sought for adjustment of exposure standards.

Advice for Employers

Consultation
• Consult with employees on shift work
• Conduct risk assessments of tasks involved
• Train managers and supervisors to understand the unique demands of shift work
• Inform employees on the potential effects of shift work, and how to minimize them
• Allow a 6-12 month trial period for new shift work systems.

Planning Shifts
• Consider whether night shift is necessary
• Choose a shift system to suit the work required
• Use a forward rotation shift system – morning/afternoon/night
• Allow enough time between shifts for travel, washing, eating and sleeping
• Keep consecutive night shifts to a minimum where possible
• Determine if the type of work is suitable for extended shifts – not too heavy, repetitive or demanding
• Avoid overtime for extended periods of time
• Set shift rosters ahead of time, to allow employees to plan leisure time
• Avoid starting morning shifts too early
• Provide adequate staff to replace absentees.

Planning Breaks
• Allow a rest break of at least 24 hours after each set of night shifts
• Allow consecutive days off, including some weekends
• Allow flexibility for employees to change shifts where practicable.

Work Conditions
• Ensure good lighting and ventilation
• Provide good meals facilities
• Offer alternatives where practicable to employees who may have difficulties adjusting to shift work.

Our safety evaluations, reports and recommendations are made solely to assist your organization in reducing hazards and the potential of hazards and accidents. These recommendations were developed from conditions observed and information provided at the time of our visit. They do not attempt to identify every possible loss potential, hazard or risk, nor do they guarantee that workplace accidents will be prevented. These safety evaluations, reports and recommendations are not a substitute for ongoing, well-researched internal safety and risk management programs. This report does not warrant that the property inspected and its operations are compliant with any law, rule or regulation.

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Advice for Shift Workers

- Shift workers adjust better if they sleep well, have family support, reduce stress, exercise, and have a healthy diet.
- Sleep
  - Let family and friends know your work schedule and sleep times
  - Take a nap of 1-4 hours before the first night shift
  - After the last night shift, have a short sleep first, and go to bed early that night
  - Keep to a regular sleep routine
  - Sleep in a cool, quiet, darkened room.

- Meals
  - Eat regular meals with a balanced diet
  - Consider having your largest meal after your day sleep
  - Have a light meal in the middle of night shift
  - Avoid greasy food, especially at night
  - Avoid too much coffee, tea or other caffeinated drinks, especially near the end of the shift.

- Other hints
  - Keep alert at work by contact with fellow workers
  - Avoid alcohol and smoking just before going to bed
  - Sleeping tablets are not the answer. Consult your doctor.