



Firefighter Fatigue FACTS



(SAFETY COMMUNICATION 2008-1)

As fire activity increases, it becomes more and more essential that personnel assigned to duty for extended periods of time pay close attention to their level of fatigue. Fatigue is often underestimated by individuals. In fact, numerous studies have identified that significant impacts of fatigue on the human body are often not realized until something negative occurs. A few key points to keep in mind:

1. Repeated loss or lack of sleep results in a phenomenon known as “sleep debt.”
2. The “quality” of sleep is just as essential as the quantity of sleep.
3. Adequate work/rest cycles should be followed to prevent negative effects of fatigue.

Fatigue can manifest itself in a variety of forms. It is extremely important that individuals, crews, Team members, support staff, etc, all become aware of the signs and symptoms of fatigue and recognize when intervention is necessary. Supervisors must be informed of potentially dangerous conditions. The effects of fatigue can directly impact our abilities to:

1. Perform various tasks
2. Maintain situational awareness and a high degree of alertness
3. React appropriately in a timely manner and fashion
4. Retain a sharp memory and recollection of information
5. Efficiently process information and make sound decisions
6. Maintain a positive and supportive attitude
7. Control levels of frustration, irritation and aggression

Humans are historically poor at estimating their own levels of fatigue. Accidents occurring as a result of fatigue can be easily prevented by recognizing the signs and alerting supervisors. Supervisors must be diligent in evaluating themselves and their crew for such signs as listed above.

Critical operations do not always lend themselves to afford adequate rest. Incident Commanders, supervisors and individuals must learn to recognize the signs and symptoms of fatigue and report when the presence of such does not provide for safe operations. Operational objectives, strategy and tactics might require modification in order to provide the safest environment for weary resources.

Individuals must be proactive in pursuing adequate rest for themselves and avoiding the traps of fatigue. Take advantage of the work/rest cycles provided and get “quality” rest and sleep. Practice good hygiene and eating habits. Remain hydrated by drinking plenty of fluids before, during and after work shifts. Avoid caffeinated drinks such as coffee, soda and “energy” drinks, which often have the opposite effects of hydration. Report any unsafe levels of fatigue, injuries or illnesses to your immediate supervisor.

