

- Ensure employees don't work too many night shifts in a row.
- Ensure shifts rotate 'forwards' that is, mornings, then afternoons, then nights.
- Ensure there are contingency plans to avoid overloading.
- Restrict night shifts to 4 in a row or to 2 in a row if they are 12 hour shifts.
- Allow at least 2 days off after nights.
- Consider personal preferences – some people are 'morning people' and some are 'night people'.
- Ensure personnel are medically and optically fit.
- Treat the lack of alertness as a hazard and introduce monitoring and mitigation so that tired staff can speak up and get assistance or rest when they judge their performance to be falling to dangerously low levels.
- Evaluate lighting, temperature, sound and other environmental modifications to reduce fatigue.
- Incidents or accidents, where fatigue may be responsible, should be thoroughly investigated.

SUMMARY

A VTS Centre should have a sufficient number of VTS personnel to ensure that the VTS operations can be carried out efficiently and safely under all conditions, with due regard to the safety of navigation within the VTS area.

Every VTS Centre should be staffed by personnel appropriately qualified for the tasks required, and with a number corresponding to the size of the VTS Centre and VTS area to be managed.

When determining, approving or revising staffing levels, the VTS Authority should take into account the principles in applicable international and national regulations on staffing levels, as well as the need to avoid or minimize excessive hours of work to ensure sufficient rest and to limit fatigue.

Further details concerning labour regulations may be found in national/regional or international legislation.



Even if you manage to stay awake, it does not mean the problem of fatigue and human reliability is solved!

Further Information

"GUIDELINES ON FATIGUE"

by the International Maritime Organization

The IMO guidelines on fatigue mitigation and management are comprehensive and provide practical advice to all the various stakeholders on how to combat it.

"GUIDELINE ON STAFFING LEVELS"

AT VTS CENTRES"

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Guide for VTS Managers

*on Fatigue Awareness
and Human Reliability*



Overview

Fatigue is one of the most significant causes of accidents both at sea and ashore and can have a serious impact on the safety of navigation.

The work of VTS personnel involves unsociable duty hours, shift work, intensive concentration, time spent travelling to and from work as well as handling critical and/or emergency situations.

The objective of this Guide is to promote a safety culture in the maritime environment by assisting VTS Managers in recognizing and mitigating the effects of fatigue in the VTS Centre. It provides an overview of the factors affecting alertness and outlines some of the strategies that can be used to counter fatigue.

What is Fatigue

There is no universally accepted technical definition for fatigue. However, common to all the definitions is degradation of human performance and diminished alertness or human reliability.

Alertness is the optimum state of the brain that enables us to make conscious decisions. Fatigue has a proven detrimental effect on alertness – this can be readily seen when a person is required to maintain a period of concentrated and sustained attention, such as looking out for the unexpected.

IMO defines fatigue as a reduction in physical and/or mental capability as the result of physical, mental or emotional exertion which may impair nearly all physical abilities including: strength, speed, reaction time, coordination, decision making or balance and to which all individuals are susceptible, regardless of skill, knowledge or training.

The negative effects of fatigue can present a disastrous risk to the safety of human life, damage to the environment and property. Because the role of VTS is

very technical and highly specialized, these negative effects could be exponentially increased where VTS personnel must be constantly alert and able to concentrate fully on the job at hand.

A very important factor is that fatigue can result in a loss of situational awareness.

Biological Clock and Circadian Rhythm

Each individual has a biological clock, and this clock regulates the body's circadian rhythm.

The biological clock makes a person sleepy or alert on a regular schedule whether they are working or not. In normal conditions, the sleep/wake cycle follows a 24-hour rhythm. However, the cycle isn't the same for everyone. Although individual rhythms vary, each person's cycle has two distinctive peaks and dips.

Independent of other sleep-related factors that cause sleepiness, there are two times of low alertness (low-points or dips) in each 24-hour period. These commonly occur between 3–5am and 3–5pm.

Our bodies move through various physical processes and states within a 24-hour period, such as sleeping, waking, and cyclical changes in body temperature, hormone levels, sensitivity to drugs, etc. This cycle represents the circadian rhythm. The biological clock, which regulates the circadian rhythm, is perfectly synchronised to the traditional pattern of daytime wakefulness and night-time sleep.

All sleep does not have the same quality and does not provide the same recuperative benefits. In order to satisfy the needs of the human body, sleep must have the following three characteristics to be most effective, namely, duration, continuity and quality.

Sleepiness is not just a question of safety. It is also a question of working environment, personal health and how the body reacts to being active at night and sleeping during the day.

Stress

One of the most common causes of fatigue is stress. Stress occurs when a person is confronted with a situation that poses a threat or demand, and the individual becomes aware of his/her inability or difficulty to cope. This can result in reduced work performance and even health problems.

Stress can also be caused by a number of other things, including the internal and external (to operational centre) environment, personal problems, broken rest, long working hours and interpersonal relationships.

Fatigue Management

A major difficulty with fatigue management is that people who are experiencing fatigue have a difficult time recognizing the signs of fatigue themselves. Managing sleep and alertness effectively can help to reduce fatigue and lead to improved well-being.

The following are some of the practical steps that can be taken to avoid and reduce fatigue;

- Introduce a fatigue management programme, which is auditable and where its success can be measured.
- Re-evaluate policies, practices and procedures that may no longer be valid.
- Be proactive in identifying hazards and reducing exposure.
- Ensure optimization of staffing levels
- Keep the schedule of duties under review to ensure that the hours of work continue to be realistic and workable.
- Ensure employees get enough rest between shifts - at least 8 hours.
- Ensure that work schedules and overtime policies do not cause excessive fatigue.