

FATIGUE MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES ON THE FARM



INTRODUCTION

In our agriculture industry, there are some times of the year where we find ourselves tired, run down or fatigued. It is a fact of our industry because we work with living systems – livestock, crops, and yes the weather. When we are tired, we are less effective and maintaining safety becomes more difficult. In fact, the level of risk for the fatigued worker is very high and is more likely to contribute to an incident.

A strong case can be built to demonstrate that fatigued workers are a significant occupational safety hazard.



HERE'S THE FACTS

- Canadian night shift workers are twice as likely to be injured on the job as day shift workers.
- Fatigue is among the top 5 causes of worker incidents
- Fatigue is 4x more likely to contribute to workplace impairment than drugs or alcohol.
- Previous hours of sleep can be directly related to occupational incident rates.
- Being awake for 21 hours is the safety equivalent of someone legally impaired by alcohol (BAC 0.08%).

Here are the steps to QuickStart your: **FATIGUE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM**

STEPS FOR FATIGUE MANAGEMENT

STEP 1

Evaluate

For those situations where we know that the potential for being tired exists, we can do some planning to arrange for assistance. For example, if we know that during the spring, we are going to be calving or seeding, we can think about our past experiences and the issues that we encountered. What were the situations that caused us to become tired, frustrated, stressed. Document those experiences and list all the potential concerns.



STEP 2

Assign Fatigue Prevention Strategies

Now that we have identified the problems, what can we do to manage the situation?

IDEA #1: Ensure your equipment is ready

The first thing to do will be to make sure your equipment is safe. Check all your guards and protective devices and make sure that they are installed. These guards will help protect you from placing your body in harms way when you are tired. Ensure that your equipment is maintained and ready for service. The less equipment repairs you have in season, the less stress and fatigue you will have.

IDEA #2: Ensure you are ready

Take care of yourself – eat properly, keep fit and check in with the doctor before the busy season. Comparable to getting ready for playoffs, you need to prepare yourself for the season ahead. Train your body and your mental capability to enhance your fatigue management skills. Eat the proper foods to provide energy instead of junk food that is low grade fuel for your body.

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STEP 2 CONT.

IDEA #3: Scheduling

You know when your busy season is likely to happen. What can you do to ensure that you have the right number of people in place to deal with the work load ahead. Consider how you will deal with peaks in the work load and what can you do with scheduling the farm work force to address fatigue. Don't forget to think about change caused by the environment and the unforeseen. Once you have a plan in place, when things go sideways, you can implement your strategies.

IDEA #4: Remove the kids from the equation

When we are fatigued, it takes all we have to focus on the work we are performing. Kids and youngsters in our work environment are a distraction that we are less able to protect when we are tired. Plan your visits to the field with your fatigue levels in mind. When you are tired, get used to saying NO to kids on the equipment, in the barn or in the field.

IDEA #5: Exercise

Take exercise and stretching breaks. This will help to get some fresh air, increase blood circulation and raise oxygen levels in the blood system. Plan your stretches and then follow through with your schedule to avoid fatigue.

Continually Assess

Now that you have a plan in place, controls identified, and you are busy at work, take the time to evaluate how things are going. Assign someone on the farm with the responsibility to watch for fatigue within the family or within the farm workers. Allow that champion to provide feedback, awareness and ideas to address fatigue issues that have crept into our farm work environment. Have that person check everyone, the farm sites, the field sites for issues that we may have missed because you are tired.

STEP 3

LET IT GROW FEED THE PROGRAM

With the seeds of fatigue management planted, watch for changes and improvements that can be made over time. For example, evaluate what worked well and what did not work well to right-size the program to your farm operation. It is also important to update your plan as your farm changes. For example when you purchase a new piece of equipment or adding new barns to your operation, evaluate how these might affect your plan.

Did you know you can live longer without food than you can without sleep? Yet something that is this central to our basic existence is often overlooked in the workplace or dismissed as "just a little tired".

SUMMARY

Simple steps towards your fatigue management program will help to ensure that you have a plan before your busy season hits. Discuss your strategies with your family and your workers to help them get ready. When things get busy, pause and review your strategies to make certain you and your farm workers are in the best condition possible.



