We all know that tiredness can make us grouchy and slow to react… but did you know it could also put your life at risk? Back in 2012, a well-reported French survey found that sleepiness behind the wheel is almost as bad as drinking and driving, and that drivers who were either drunk or sleepy were at least twice as likely to be responsible for a vehicle accident compared to their well-rested or sober counterparts. What is less well publicized, however, is the role fatigue can play on other types of accidents – particularly in the workplace. In this short post we look at the risks posed by sleepy workers, as well as considering the steps we can take to ensure they don’t come to, or cause any, harm.

What is fatigue?
Fatigue refers to the decline in mental and/or physical performance that results from prolonged exertion, sleep loss and/or disruption of the internal clock. It can result in slower reactions, reduced ability to process information, memory lapses, absent-mindedness, decreased awareness, lack of attention, underestimation of risk and reduced coordination. Fatigue can lead to errors and accidents, ill-health and injury, and reduced productivity. Fatigue has been shown to be a factor in some of the worst industrial disasters in history, such as the Chernobyl Disaster, the Exxon Valdez oil spill, and the 2005 Texas City refinery explosion.

What causes fatigue?
You will undoubtedly know from your own personal experiences that there are many individual causes of fatigue, such as late nights out, young children disturbing your sleep or medical sleep disorders such as insomnia. However, there are also a number of work-related factors that employers should consider. One of the most significant of these factors is poorly designed shift-working arrangements and long working hours, meaning employees accrue a ‘sleep debt’. Night workers are particularly at risk of fatigue because their day sleep is often lighter, shorter and more easily disturbed because of daytime noise and a natural reluctance to sleep during daylight.
Tips for better sleep.

Try to go to sleep and get up at the same time every day. Sticking to a consistent sleep-wake schedule helps set your body’s internal clock and optimize the quality of your sleep. Start by setting a realistic bedtime that will work with your lifestyle. Choose a time when you normally feel tired, so that you don’t toss and turn. If you’re getting enough sleep, you should wake up naturally without an alarm. If you need an alarm clock to wake up on time, you may need to set an earlier bedtime.

Avoid sleeping in—even on weekends or nights you’ve stayed up late. It can be tempting to sleep in on weekends, but even a couple hour difference in wake time disrupts your internal clock. The more your weekend/weekday sleep schedules differ, the worse the jetlag-like symptoms you’ll experience. If you need to make up for a late night, opt for a daytime nap rather than sleeping in. This strategy allows you to pay off your sleep debt without disturbing your natural sleep-wake rhythm, which often backfires in insomnia and throws you off for days.

Be smart about napping. As mentioned above, napping is a good way to recharge and make up for lost sleep hours. But if you tend to have trouble falling asleep or staying asleep throughout the night, napping can make things worse. If insomnia is a problem for you, consider eliminating naps altogether or limiting them to 15 to 20 minutes in the early afternoon.

Fight after-dinner drowsiness. If you find yourself getting sleepy way before your bedtime, get off the couch and do something mildly stimulating to avoid falling asleep, such as washing the dishes, calling a friend, or getting clothes ready for the next day. If you give in to the drowsiness, you may wake up later in the night and have trouble getting back to sleep.

Exploding Bomb

This month’s featured pictogram shown on the left represents an explosive hazard.

The symbol is an exploding bomb.

This symbol appears on chemicals that are:

- **Explosives**—which is a solid or liquid chemical capable of a chemical reaction that causes damage to the surroundings,

- **Self-Reactive**—heating may cause fire or explosion without the need for air, or

- **Organic peroxides**—again, heating may cause fire or explosion.

An example of an organic peroxide is methyl ethyl ketone peroxide. There is an extreme risk of an explosion from exposure to shock, friction, flame, or other sources of ignition. It is dangerously reactive and may decompose violently.

Hope that got your attention!