



Stressed AND Fatigued

“People who live long lives get seven to nine hours of sleep each night on a regular basis. Our bodies need sleep to regenerate and our minds need sleep to rest.” ~Dr. Pat Bolding, Warren Clinic, Tulsa Oklahoma

Stressed about the Calendar and the Clock



What is a normal sight in control rooms? A clock is always in sight, and is closely watched as the shift approaches its end. If the relief person does not arrive at the expected time, the sense of anxiety and stress may increase. Human beings want to leave work so they can go home and rest and enjoy their families.

The calendar with the shift schedule is another common sight, and it is regularly viewed, updated, discussed, and debated. It can become a source of stress because people are vying for times when they can:

- Socialize with family and friends
- Participate in events that are scheduled with short notice
- Exchange shifts with others for these events
- Take or extend vacations to enjoy more time off the job

Companies should have policies for vacation selection and other absences that are balanced, fair, and consistently applied.

Stressed at Work

I would not want to be an air traffic controller nowadays. Not only are they trying to stay awake when humans want to sleep, now they are under close scrutiny from their supervisors, the FAA, the DOT, the media, and the public. There has been an ongoing project to address air traffic controller fatigue and related issues. Now, attention that might focus on the inherent problems with their work schedules has increased the stress on the individuals doing the work.

Stress is the adverse reaction people have to high levels of pressure and other demands placed on them. I suspect there is more supervision in the control towers across the USA now. If the top air traffic officials are resigning, it is reasonable to assume that the middle level and front line managers are closely observing the controller because those managers want to save their jobs.

That increased supervision increases stress because the amount of control exerted with employees decreases their sense of autonomy and increases stress. Job postings for pipeline employees usually state that employees must be able to work independently with a minimal amount of supervision. Most people like that sense of control.

A controller or any working person is expected to handle the workload and to make no mistakes and to be alert at all times. These demands may seem unreasonable. Once some technicians had completed the normal work day when a pumping unit failed. The company had an expectation that the repair had to be completed before the technicians left the facility. After a total of 17 hours, they had become fatigued due to the length of the workday and the amount of work. I sent them home and suggested they would do better after some sleep. When they came back the next morning, the technicians completed the repair with fewer mistakes and in less time. Why? Because they slept at night instead of trying to do work that required concentration and attention to detail. Would you have sent them home to rest?

Some people do not have the option to sleep at night, and their work also requires concentration and attention to detail. Managers should make demands reasonable, increase the sense of control, and respect the dignity of all employees.