The Dangers of Sleep Deprivation

Sleepiness clouds your thinking and causes you to make more errors, react slower, and use poorer judgment than you do when you’re alert. One of the most dangerous aspects of sleepiness is that people often misjudge their own state of mind and abilities, believing they are able to handle important decisions and tasks, when in fact they are not.

Many large studies have found a relationship between sleepiness and work-related injuries, according to the National Sleep Foundation.

Highly sleepy workers are 70 percent more likely to be involved in accidents than non-sleepy workers, and workers with chronic insomnia (difficulty getting to or staying asleep) are far more likely than well-rested individuals to report industrial accidents or injuries.

And this from the American Safety Council: “Famously, in 2005, OSHA fined oil titan, BP, a record-breaking $87 million for ignoring safety problems that led to an explosion at a Texas refinery. Escaping gas from an octane processing tower ignited, resulting in the death of 15 workers and the injury of 170 others. Though employer oversight harbored a dangerous work environment, investigations also found that some employees had worked 12 hours a day for nearly 30 days straight — a fact that may have impacted the way that the employees reacted and responded to the situation. OSHA.gov states that workers are 37% more likely to sustain an injury when working a 12-hour day. It is clear that employees at the Texas refinery were at a heightened risk.”

In the case of the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant incident, which occurred at 4 a.m., overnight shift workers failed to respond quickly and appropriately to a mechanical problem that caused a near meltdown; sleepiness is thought to be partly to blame. The nuclear plant disaster at Chernobyl, which took place at 1:30 a.m., is also linked to human error influenced by sleepiness.

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