MANAGEMENT OF FATIGUE RISKS

THE AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF METEOROLOGY (the Bureau) is Australia’s national weather, climate and water agency. It has over 1700 geographically dispersed staff providing surveillance, forecasts and warning services 24 hours a day, every day of the year. These services assist Australians to manage and live within their natural environment, including during drought, floods, fires, storms, tsunamis and tropical cyclones. Through regular forecasts, warnings, monitoring and advice spanning the Australian region and the Antarctic Territory, the Bureau provides one of the most fundamental and widely used services of government.

The Risk – Why good work design was needed

Fatigue was identified as a risk to staff due to the demand in maintaining an around-the-clock service. In addition to the risk to the health and safety of workers, this risk had the potential to affect the ongoing accuracy and timeliness of the Bureau’s services.

The Approach – What the good work design covered

The Bureau developed an enterprise wide program to manage the risk of fatigue. It adopted a comprehensive risk based approach with a steering group to oversee the implementation of a Fatigue Risk Management Program.

Significant data gathering was undertaken along with extensive consultation with all Bureau staff. This included engagement through a consultative group, fact finding workshops, roster and schedule analysis using bio-mathematical predictive software, surveys, interviews and invitations to participate through the Bureau newsletters. The intelligence gathered was used to evaluate fatigue risk and potential impact on staff and operational and strategic objectives. The steering and consultative groups’ held workshops and agreed on preventative actions for the risks identified.

Delivery of the Fatigue Management Action Plan is a key performance indicator (KPI) within the Bureau.

Implementation and Actions – How good work design was applied

The Bureau used a collaborative approach and a systematic process of identifying the issues, assessing the risks and agreeing the actions. This not only mitigated fatigue risks but also garnered Bureau wide acceptance and ownership of the resulting actions.
The agreed actions included:

**Engaging with decision makers and leaders**
- Fatigue management is a key initiative in the work health and safety (WHS) strategic and annual plan under the pillars of leadership, proactivity and education.
- Fatigue Management Policy and Procedure implemented.
- Performance Development Tip Sheet for managers to address fatigue hazards and risks in their operations.
- Staff fatigue is a fundamental consideration during Business Continuity Planning regarding resources required to respond to an extreme weather event.

**Learning from experts**
- The Bureau use ergonomic analysis of Forecasting Centres’ 24/7 operations.

**Actively involving the people who do the work**
- An action plan and communication strategy was implemented.
- A fatigue management champion network was established.
- Fatigue risk was incorporated into Bureau courses, information sessions, inductions and guidance material.

**Identifying hazards and assessing and controlling risks**
- Multiple, customised, mandatory e-learning modules on recognition and management of fatigue.
- Formal napping protocols for at risk workers e.g. for shift work.
- Rostering principles and hours of work guidelines established.
- Review of shift work arrangements and roster variations to optimise roster patterns.
- A fatigue management portal was created on the Bureau’s WHS intranet to house all fatigue management resources. This contains:
  - Fatigue e-learning modules
  - Fatigue Management Policy and Procedure
  - Fatigue Management Champions list
  - Information kit for extreme weather events
  - Fatigue Project Implementation Plan
  - Communication Strategy, and
  - Fatigue review project reports, presentations and additional resources and information.
- Fatigue management incorporated into other relevant WHS procedures such as Safe Driving procedures.
The Benefits

Fatigue management principles are now embedded into the Bureau’s business-as-usual activities, from planning field trips and managing project deadlines through to managing during extreme weather events.

Staff are better informed with Bureau wide education and information providing clarity on fatigue risks and causes. There were 2488 e-learning modules completed by 30 June 2015.

There is broad ownership of the outcomes by Bureau staff. This is due to the robust staff engagement process adopted to ensure transparency of data gathering and agreement of actions.

The long term benefits of this approach are the ongoing management of fatigue risk. This is crucial for the health, safety and welfare of Bureau staff, particularly those who make operational decisions and provide crucial national and international advice about extreme weather events (cyclones, fire, flood, storm surge, tsunami) upon which emergency services and the community base their own risk management actions.

The purpose of the initiative was to provide the Bureau with an effective and holistic approach to manage fatigue risk, this risk management approach demonstrates how other risks can be similarly addressed.

To cite unsolicited feedback from one Bureau staff member, “This policy and procedure is a cultural shift for us and I know how much work by many people went into the research and consultation prior to issue.”