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## Shift Work Dangers

Shift work is becoming more common in the construction and trade fields. Industries have included shift work for decades as a means of increasing production.

Construction fields are also benefiting from shift work schedules and night shift work for reasons like:

- Schedule conflicts
- Safety
- Weather
- Production

Many times, shift workers and night shift workers see additional pay as an incentive from their employers for working during irregular hours. Other times, construction at night cannot be avoided and becomes a necessity.

According to the Bureau of Labor and Statistics, around 15 million Americans work in a role that requires night shifts or irregular hours. Shift work in construction has trade-offs that workers who become aware of can adapt to help make it safer.

### **What Are the Cons of Shift Work?**

The main takeaway from working the night shift is the disruption of your circadian rhythm or your body clock. Your body is programmed to sleep at night and be awake during the day. This same body clock influences when you eat, wake up, etc... and much of it is related to the amount of light you see.

Naturally, at night on the construction site, you will see dark skies and likely have to fight off the feelings of sleepiness. Then during the day when you want to sleep, you cannot or do not sleep as well which puts you into a deficit that affects other areas of performance.

One study completed at Rockefeller University noted a cascade of possible symptoms reported by shift workers including:

- Weight gain
- Inability to focus
- Impulsivity
- Slower thinking
- Slower reactions
- Behavioral changes
- Zombie like fatigue
- Increased levels of stress due to missing family or health issues

There were physiological changes noted far beyond simple “lack of sleep” symptoms.

### **What Are the Hazards of Shift Work in Construction?**

The impact of disrupting your circadian rhythm can be seen in unfortunate accidents and research that is available to all. EHS Today posted an article including research using worker’s compensation claims that show construction workers work more late-night shifts than other workers and there is a significantly higher rate of injury on the job after the sun goes down.

Some hazards that increased the hazards of road construction at night for example include:

- Less traffic meant drivers drive faster
- Drivers are more likely to be impaired
- Brightly lit work zones cause glare and shadows
- Increases in trip and fall injuries
- Decreased reaction times for construction workers
- Emergencies at night harder to respond to
- Increases in pedestrian vs. vehicle accidents
- Increases in struck by and back over accidents

Construction workers who work at night are at a higher risk for fatigue-related accidents compared to their peers who work in the daytime.