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| ***REPLACE WITH YOUR MASTHEAD*** |
| **VFIS logo black JPG** | **SOG Title:** |
| **SOG Number:** |
| **Original Date:** | **Revision Date:** |
| **ABC Fire Department General Operating Guideline** |

**Managing Fatigue in EMS Operations**

***This is a sample of a standard operating guideline (SOG) on this topic. You should review the content, modify as appropriate for your organization, have it reviewed by your leadership team and if appropriate your legal counsel. Once adopted, make sure the SOG is communicated to members, implemented and performance monitored for effective implementation.***

**Purpose:**

To discuss the issues impacting fatigue in EMS operations and methods to manage the fatigue.

**Procedure:**

Fatigue impacts personal health as well as the ability of responders to perform key functions including patient care, incident command and vehicle operations. Studies have shown that 17 hours of sustained wakefulness is equivalent to a blood alcohol level of 0.05 percent and that after 24 hours, it is equivalent to 0.10 percent – more than the legal limit for driving. Despite this evidence, efforts to move to shorter shifts continue to face significant resistance and the number of EMS agencies using 24- and 48-hour shifts continues to rise.

**Contributing Factors**

ESOs often choose a 24-hour shift structure for economic reasons or for convenience of the staff or department. However, in a busy ESO these decisions must be made with consideration of patient and responder safety. These decisions are often compounded by:

* Shift workload
* Insufficient staffing
* Call offs
* Moonlighting (34% work multiple jobs)
* Consecutive Shifts
* Personal schedules – Fit for Duty Policy

**Effects of Fatigue**

Fatigue significantly affects a responder’s health and performance. Alarmingly, research has found that more than half of EMS responders report severe mental and/or physical fatigue. A leading cause of fatigue is sleep deprivation, which has been linked to cardiovascular disease, mood changes, obesity, and increased resistance to insulin, among other conditions. Additionally, EMS fatigue has a potentially severe impact on performance and patient care. One study shows that the odds of a medical error or adverse event are twice as high among fatigued EMS responders compared to non-fatigued responders.

**Fatigue Mitigation Strategies**

Extended shifts with high call volume create a significant risk to both employees and the public citizens they intend to serve. While decreased call volume and sleeping on duty may lower the exposure, consideration should be given to the following:

* Adopt fatigue/sleepiness survey instruments to monitor fatigue in personnel
* Avoid rotating shifts which change rapidly (day/night)
* Monitor the responders average utilization rate which should be less than 40% per shift
* Restrict shift lengths to less than 24hours in duration
* Provide an opportunity to nap while on duty along with a quiet room to rest after a busy shift and before commuting home
* Inform responders about maintaining a proper diet
* Provide access to caffeine as a fatigue countermeasure
* Educate responders on sleep health and the dangers of fatigue to mitigate fatigue and fatigue related risks

**Conclusion**

There is no one simple solution to the problem; and, what may work for one agency may not work for another. The difficulty is realizing even ESOs with a lower average call volume sometimes have a busy shift leading to an increased chance of a fatigue related incident. Traditional schedule templates and demand from increased call volume cannot disregard the well-demonstrated impact of fatigue on and organization’s safety results.

***This is a sample guideline furnished to you by VFIS. Your organization should review this guideline and make the necessary modifications to meet your organization’s needs. The intent of this guideline is to assist you in reducing exposure to the risk of injury, harm or damage to personnel, property and the general public. For additional information on this topic, contact your VFIS Risk Control representative.***

**References:**

VFIS Communique – “Managing Fatigue in EMS Operations”

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