

New solutions to tired old problem

■ Fatigue Management Planning an Oil Industry Necessity

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The Pipeline

Fatigue Management Planning may sound like something that would fall under the guise of common sense, but recent studies and long held statistics are proving it's not as common as it should be.

Specializing in stress and fatigue management, Dr. Don Melnychuk of Nadon Consulting Ltd. recently spoke about this practice at the Enform Petroleum Safety Conference held November 6th, in Fort St. John, B.C.

"Fatigue is defined as inadequate restorative sleep," says Dr. Melnychuk. "But the amount of sleep each person requires and the levels of fatigue they experience, differs from person to person. Unlike alcohol whose impairment levels can be quantified by taking a breathalyser, fatigue is something that can cause similar symptoms of intoxication but without a standard to measure it by."

Citing the level of intoxication that exists in Alberta, when a breathalyser indicates an individual with an alcohol level of .08 as intoxicated, Melnychuk says that studies have proven that after 17hrs of wakefulness, a similar level of .05 intoxication exists.

A level that increases to the .08 level after 20 hrs of wakefulness.

"If you require 7 hrs of sleep a night, and only get 5, by Friday you would have short changed yourself of 10 hrs of sleep, which equates to .10 as an impairment level."

But the only time that kind of

fatigue gets measured, says Dr. Melnychuk is when someone does something stupid.

In Alberta in 2007 more than 155 people died in industrial accidents and more than 170,000 workers were injured. Of those deaths and injuries, a great number can be directly linked to fatigue.

"Motor vehicle collisions kill more workers in the oil patch than any other form of industrial accident," says Dr. Melnychuk. "And 50% of single vehicle collisions are caused by fatigue."

A situation the oil and gas industry has begun to sit up and take notice of.

With a typical day on the oil patch involving long hours, shift work, extensive travel time, and oft times unhealthy lifestyles, developing a fatigue management plan is key to avoiding becoming just another statistic.

"It used to be the mindset that you had to "tough it out" and do the job at all costs, no matter what your level of fatigue was, but what I'm hearing now from the industry is that personal safety overrides the need to "get the job done."

"We can get the job done, we can't get another you."

Citing some of the companies he has worked with, such as Penn West, Imperial and Shell as leaders in this new mindset where a workers fatigue level and safety overrides the job, Dr. Melnychuk says it's a very refreshing thing to see.

"I'm starting to hear this more and more from companies from the top down: This is our guideline and we want to you follow it. Something they extend even to their contractors."

But no matter how much a company stresses to it's employees that safety comes first before the job, the ultimate decision on whether or not they are too fatigued to continue on, rests on the employees themselves.

"There are a lot of things that

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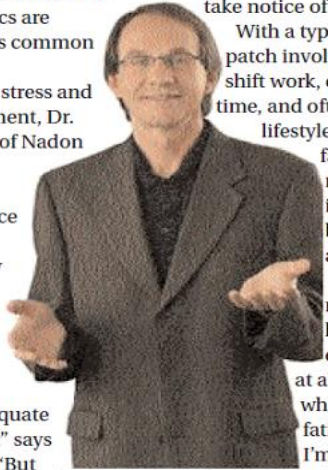
Dr. Melnychuk

you can plan for," says Dr. Melnychuk. "And these are the things I work on with supervisors, directors and the foremen in charge of workers, as well as with the frontline people themselves, to develop."

"By developing a plan, and learning the signs of fatigue and how to improve the effects of fatiguing situations through understanding circadian rhythms,

and the effect that diet, exercise and lifestyle choices have on our own fatigue levels, we can go a long way to preventing fatigue related accidents and injuries."

For more about Dr. Don Melnychuk's Fatigue Management Seminars or to see information related to develop your own Fatigue Management Plan, visit the Nadon Consulting Ltd. website at www.nadon.ca.



**Dr. Don Melnychuk
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