

Fatigue management guidelines



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Introduction

Driver fatigue is not only a risk to the health and safety of taxi drivers – it is also a risk to the safety of passengers and other members of the public.

In Victoria alone, the effects of driver fatigue (such as falling asleep at the wheel or not being able to pay attention) are involved in more than 25 per cent of road crashes and have resulted in more than 60 deaths and 300-400¹ serious injuries each year.

Managing taxi driver fatigue and making sure that taxi services are safe in Victoria is very important and will need the help of all those who work in the industry.

It is said that after 17 hours of being awake drivers have double the risk of an accident (the same as drink driving with a blood alcohol content level of 0.05) and after 22 hours the risk is five times greater. Shift workers are also six times more likely to be in a fatigue affected road crash than other workers².

1. What is the purpose of this guide?

This guide is for taxi drivers, operators and network service providers (NSP), to help manage driver fatigue in the taxi industry. It will help everyone understand:

- what fatigue is
- how it can affect the safety of taxi drivers and the public and
- what can be done to reduce it.

The information in this booklet should be used as a plan or guide to help improve the workplace safety of drivers, and the safety of taxi passengers and other road users. This information is to be provided to everyone who works in the Victorian taxi industry.

¹ Transport Accident Commission, *Reducing Fatigue – a case study*.

² VicRoads Fact Sheet, No. 13, *The Hazards of Shift Work*.

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2. What is fatigue?

It is normal to feel tired or drowsy at work sometimes, but fatigue is much more than this. Fatigue is a continued feeling of being tired, sleepy, or not having any energy that leads to a person being totally exhausted and not able to do normal things well.

Fatigue is the body's reaction to things such as little or no sleep, stress, working or driving during normal sleep times and other things such as a person's medical condition or the use of medication.

Shift workers are at greater risk as they are often trying to sleep when the body is most active (day) or trying to work when the body wants to be asleep (night). Working at night for most people particularly between the hours of 2am-6am can greatly increase the risk of having an accident.

3. Why does fatigue matter to taxi drivers?

Taxi drivers, because of their work and hours, are at risk of suffering from fatigue, which can have long term effects on their health. One study has shown that taxis are approximately four and a half times more likely to be involved in a fatal accident than other vehicles³. Another study has shown a relatively high number of taxi accidents occurred between 2am and 4am, at times when drivers had often been working for up to 11 hours⁴.

Taxi drivers must be especially careful to properly manage fatigue, for their own safety and the safety of passengers and other road users.

4. Fatigue management responsibilities for drivers

Under Victorian occupation health and safety law, a self-employed person must where possible make sure that they are not exposed to any health and safety risks.

As a taxi driver you need to know if your working conditions might make you more likely to become fatigued and, if so, how you can take care of this so that you can work and drive safely.

³ Staysafe 36 (2007), as cited in Rowland, B.D., Freeman, J.E., Davey, J.D. and Wishart, D.E. (2007), 'A profile of taxi drivers' road safety attitudes and behaviours: Is safety important?', Proceedings of the 3rd international Road Safety Conference, Perth, Western Australia.

⁴ Dalziel, J.R. and Job, R.F.S. (1997), Taxi drivers and road safety – A report to the Federal Office of Road Safety, p.30.

5. Effects of fatigue

Falling asleep or 'nodding off' when driving is not the only sign of fatigue. It is important that anyone in the taxi industry be aware of the effects that fatigue may have on a person's health and work.

Short term effects at work may include:

- falling asleep (for any amount of time)
- not being aware of your surroundings
- being unable to see risks (or possible harm)
- finding it hard to focus (or being easily distracted)
- low hand-eye coordination
- being unable to think clearly or logically
- not being able to make decisions
- being unable to talk or write clearly
- having difficulty controlling emotions or feelings
- higher chance of having an accident or injury
- making lots of mistakes
- reacting slowly to things
- being unable to remember things and events (in order).

If left unmanaged, the long term effects of fatigue on a person's health may lead to:

- heart disease
- diabetes
- high blood pressure
- gastrointestinal problems
- depression
- anxiety
- reduced testosterone levels in young men (and loss of sexual interest).



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6. Signs of fatigue

Being able to see the signs of fatigue can help you to decide if it is safe for you or someone else to drive a taxi. Always be aware of high fatigue risks that exist at night.

Some signs of fatigue are:

- not feeling refreshed after sleep
- poor concentration
- not being able to see clearly
- the need for longer sleep during breaks
- wanting things done quickly (or having a short temper)
- always yawning
- falling asleep at work
- fidgeting
- stretching
- sore or heavy eyes
- difficulty keeping eyes open and on the road
- having blurred vision
- difficulty remembering periods of time when driving
- poor control when driving a taxi or car
- difficulty maintaining steady speed
- drifting outside your lane.

Stop driving immediately if you find it hard to keep your eyes open and your head is nodding – these often happen after microsleeps. Microsleeps are very short periods of sleep you may not even be aware of.

7. Causes of fatigue in the taxi industry

Many people drive taxis while studying or as a second job, while other drivers may feel pressure to work long hours to make money to look after their family, to buy things they need or to make ends meet. These drivers may be putting themselves and others at risk every time they drive a taxi, unless they know some of the causes of fatigue and how to take care of it.

Fatigue can be caused by driving a taxi. It can also be caused by other things outside of work or a combination of these. It is important to understand some of the things that can cause fatigue and if possible to lower or avoid these.

Some causes of fatigue may include:

Factors at work

length of time worked

length of shifts

number of consecutive shifts

start and finish time of shifts (working at night increases the chance of fatigue)

not enough recovery time between shifts

long periods of time being awake

shift patterns

not enough rest breaks

bad weather or hard working conditions

mentally hard work (for example, long times waiting for a passenger/fare or having to think quickly and clearly for long periods – often during times of high passenger demand and low numbers of taxis).

Factors outside of work

poor quality sleep

loss of sleep

busy social life

family needs

other work (employment)

study

travel time

long periods of time being awake

sleep problems such as sleep apnoea.

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8. Sleep

The only real way to treat fatigue is to sleep. The best sleep you can get is night sleep.

Aim to get seven and a half hours of quality (uninterrupted) sleep each day – sleeping too little or too long can cause fatigue.

If you are having less than six hours sleep each night or regularly over a weekly period, you will greatly increase your risk of fatigue. If you begin a shift after less than five hours sleep in the last 24 hours, your risk of an accident is up to three times higher.

Night shift workers will often have to sleep during the day. Sleeping during the day can be difficult due to the sunlight outside and the body not being ready to sleep. If you have to sleep during the day, make the room as dark and as quiet as possible and stick to a sleeping pattern. Allow a longer time for sleep than you usually would for sleeping through the night.

If you are unable to sleep or sleep well, snore a lot or have trouble breathing when sleeping, then seek medical advice.



9. Work hours and fatigue management guide

Long periods of driving can be a cause of fatigue. To lower the chance of driver fatigue you should check your shifts and make sure that the time and length of your shifts are not more than the suggested periods listed below:

- try to work/drive within the recommended hours of work guidelines below and keep a record
- if you study or drive a taxi as a second job, make sure you include study hours or hours you work at your first job in your calculations
- your risk of fatigue increases greatly if you have been awake for 17 hours or more
- when doing any calculations, start the 24-hour time period from when you woke up (not from when you started work).

You should not start a shift if you are likely to work more than the recommended hours listed below.

Hours of work

Time period	Recommended maximum work hours (including breaks)	Recommended minimum continuous rest period
24 hours	12 hours	10 hours
14 days	144 hours	Two x 24 hours
28 days	288 hours	Four x 24 hours (spaced evenly throughout 28 days)

Long periods of driving without taking a break increases your risk of fatigue. Risks increase after two hours of continuous driving, and after 12 hours of continuous driving the risks become severe.

Note:

Drivers and operators are able to record the shift times they have agreed to in the Taxi Services Commission's (TSC) 2009 model bailment agreement. Copies of this agreement can be downloaded from the TSC website at www.taxi.vic.gov.au or picked up from the TSC Customer Service Centre, Level 23, 80 Collins Street Melbourne.

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10. Tips for drivers on avoiding fatigue

The best remedy for sleepiness is sleep, but in managing fatigue drivers should consider the following:

Shift schedules

- Keep night shifts to a minimum (no more than four nights in a row).
- If changing from day to night shifts (or night to day), take a 24-hour break in between.
- Don't do quick shift changeovers, such as finishing at 11pm and starting again at 7am.
- Taking a nap before working night shifts can be useful if you have not had enough sleep during the day.

Working/breaks

- Take plenty of rest breaks and drink water.
- Every two hours of driving without a break increases your risk of fatigue.
- Make sure that you allow enough time in your day for normal or extended uninterrupted rest periods.

Don't drive if you feel fatigued – if you notice that you may have 'nodded off', even for a second, stop driving/working straight away, take a nap or have a break and something to drink.

Drugs and alcohol

- Don't drink lots of alcohol – it affects the quality of your sleep. **You must not drive a taxi with any amount of alcohol in your blood (Section 42 of the Road Safety Act 1986 requires the driver of a taxi to have a zero blood alcohol level).**
- Don't take anything (that is, stimulants) to keep you awake – they delay the need for sleep.
- Avoid drinking any coffee or tea before going to bed.

The use of caffeine/coffee or other stimulants you might take to keep you awake do not replace sleep. Research has shown that activities such as turning up the radio, opening the window or using the air conditioner do not work to avoid fatigue. The use of these to stay awake to allow you to keep working or driving a taxi is not safe and is not ok.

Fitness

- Exercise regularly to stay fit and healthy.
- Keep a check on your weight – if you put on too much weight it may cause sleeping problems.

Medical conditions

- People who are heavy snorers or snore a lot may be experiencing obstructive sleep apnoea. This condition is common and can be treated.
- If you regularly feel sleepy while driving or often doze off during other activities or show symptoms of sleep apnoea, you should seek advice from a sleep specialist.
- If you have a medical problem including irregular breathing and/or insomnia you should seek advice from a doctor.
- Tell your operator about any medical conditions that may affect you being able to work or that could bring on fatigue.
- If your medication makes you drowsy or sleepy, ask your doctor to give you another type of medication. **Do not drive if you feel your medication is affecting you or your driving.**



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11. Information for network service providers and taxi operators

Fatigue management and the safety and wellbeing of drivers and members of the public are the responsibility of all industry participants.

Taxi operators have a responsibility for monitoring their drivers. Under the TSC's taxi industry accreditation regime, taxi operators have an obligation to ensure that 'no taxi is operated on a highway by a person whom the operator is aware (or ought reasonably to be aware), is not fit to be in possession or control of the vehicle at that time'.

Network service providers (NSPs) and taxi operators should continuously support and promote this safety initiative and make use of the TSC's *Fatigue Management – Guidelines for the Victorian Taxi Industry* in their dealings with taxi drivers.

- Accredited NSPs should, where practical, have procedures in place to ensure that their taxi operators/drivers do not work in excess of the maximum recommended hours outlined above.
- Any agreements between the NSPs and taxi operators should contain principles supporting fatigue management.
- In line with their occupational health and safety obligations, accredited NSPs are required to advise relevant taxi operators if they become aware of the existence of a risk to the safety of a taxi driver, customers or members of the public.
- Under the TSC's business and service standards for accreditation, taxi operators should have systems and protocols in place to ensure that all their drivers are fit to work at the start of their shift (including checking that they are not fatigued).

For example, operators could ensure they do not bail their vehicle out to a driver for periods of time in excess of the maximum work hours outlined in this guide.

- Taxi operators must be aware of their responsibilities under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004*.

12. Related documents

- *Transport (Compliance and Miscellaneous) Act 1983* (Vic.)
- *Road Safety Act 1986*
- Taxi Services Commission – *Accreditation of taxi-cab industry participants, business and service standards*
- *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004* (Vic.)
- WorkSafe Victoria, *Fatigue – Prevention in the workplace*
- WorkSafe Victoria and Transport Accident Commission, *Guide to safe work related driving*
- VicRoads Fact Sheet, No. 2, *Driving and Fatigue*
- VicRoads Fact Sheet, No. 13, *The Hazards of Shift Work*
- Transport Accident Commission, *Reducing Fatigue – a case study*

13. Additional sources of information

- Taxi Services Commission - www.taxi.vic.gov.au
- WorkSafe Victoria - www.worksafe.vic.gov.au
- VicRoads - www.vicroads.vic.gov.au
- Transport Accident Commission - www.tac.vic.gov.au

For further information please contact the
Taxi Services Commission on 1800 638 802 (toll-free)
or visit www.taxi.vic.gov.au