

Health and Safety Bulletin: The Importance of Rest and Sleep

EMS is a vital public health resource, providing care for more than 30 million ill and injured patients annually. Poor sleep and fatigue among EMS workers represent potential threats to patient care, provider wellbeing, and the public's health and trust in EMS.

A 2007 The International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) funded review sheds light on numerous elements of sleep, fatigue, and negative impacts of both on shift workers. The authors concluded that "Fire fighters and EMS responders are at risk for the decrements in mental and physical performance that have been well documented among others working long hours and during the night..."

Sleep provides more benefits than previously thoughts and is absolutely crucial to promoting health and bodily function. It is essential for maintaining:

- Mood
- Memory
- Cognitive Performance
- Maintaining normal function of endocrine and immune systems



Lack of sleep does far more than make us grumpy. Studies show a growing link between sleep duration and serious health problems including:

- Obesity
- Diabetes
- Hypertension; and
- Depression



Getting three, five, or less than seven hours of sleep a night for seven consecutive nights can significantly impair alertness and motor performance

In EMS, other factors exacerbate the problem too. For one, many providers work multiple jobs. Another is the prevalence of 24-hour shifts. Employees like the ample time off those provide, and they're no problem if you get enough down time to sleep, but at a time when most services' call volumes are rising, that can be increasingly difficult.

References:

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