

Working Hours

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Purpose

The University of South Australia has a primary duty of care to employees and Higher Degree by Research (HDR) students to ensure, as far as reasonably practicable, they are not exposed to hazards and risks that could arise from their working hour's arrangements and to address these hazards and risks through systematic risk assessment. This procedure is designed to assist managers to ensure risk to employees from their working hours is mitigated or effectively managed.

Scope

This document and procedure specifically applies to extended working hours, shift work, on call work, international travel and any other working arrangement where working hours may pose a risk to health and safety.

Definitions

Fatigue Critical Tasks – tasks that are inherently dangerous and require a high level of concentration, alertness and/or coordination (e.g. operating machinery, working with electricity) and where the consequences of a mistake or error in judgement could cause serious injury to people.

Shift Work – in general terms any work which is conducted outside of the standard 8 am to 6pm work cycle including, permanent night shift, or other shift extending into normal sleep time, compressed work weeks with extra-long work periods and rotating shifts. Although in relation to the following staff categories special definitions apply:

- Security Staff: afternoon shift is when ordinary hours of work finishes at between 6pm and 11pm Monday - Friday
- Library Staff: a shift finishing outside the hours of 7am to 7pm Monday - Friday
- Document Services Staff: a shift commencing at or after 4pm and finishing at or after 8am the following day
- Academic Staff: no defined hours of work except being expressed on an annual basis (currently at 1725 hrs per annum)

Sleep Debt – the difference between a person's required amount of sleep and the actual amount of sleep obtained. Sleep debt is cumulative so if 2 hours are lost per day they cumulate to result in a 14 hour sleep debt in a week.

Working Hours – means the number of hours worked for an employer and when those hours are worked.

General

In situations where employees or HDR students work with hazardous materials, equipment, driving or noise the amount of time they are exposed is directly related to the level of risk. Most guidance material refers to time weighted average of 8 hours.

Long working hours, or working at times when the human body wants to sleep, can increase levels of fatigue. This can result in poor concentration, impaired recollection of timing and events, poor judgement, poor communication, impaired hand eye coordination, visual perception, vigilance, and slower reaction times.

Evidence also indicates that fatigued people are more likely to indulge in risky behaviours. This can lead to poor performance and increased risk of injury or illness. The level of risk increases when people are performing fatigue critical tasks. Accidents due to fatigue are most likely to happen when the body most wants to sleep i.e. between midnight and dawn. Risk of accidents increases at this time if it is coupled with long hours.

Sleep loss can be contributed to by extended working hours, irregular and unpredictable hours, time of day sleep is taken, shift work, having more than one job and underlying health problems.

Roles and Responsibilities

Line Managers – (including Head of School, Unit or Institute) are responsible to ensure that:

- This procedure is implemented in their area of responsibility and necessary resources are provided to support implementation;
- Supervisors are aware of legal requirements and safe work practices associated with working hours;
- Employee working hours are reviewed regularly and in particular as workloads increase or work changes.

Supervisors – (any person who has responsibility for the working hours of staff or HDR students) are responsible for ensuring that:

- They monitor employee and HDR student workloads;
- Risk assessments are carried out or standard operating procedures are in place where hazards relating to working hours are identified, for example, international travel where jet lag is a factor;
- Appropriate information, instruction, training and supervision are provided as necessary to ensure employee/HDR student health.

Staff and HDR Students are responsible for ensuring that:

- They comply with arrangements put in place by the University and follow any reasonable instructions to reduce risk associated with working hours;
- They don't place themselves or others at risk of injury or illness from their hours worked;
- They report any concerns or incidents to their supervisor;
- They are not adversely affected by a drug or other substance, such as alcohol, that may endanger themselves or others.

Safety & Wellbeing are responsible to:

- Develop and maintain appropriate procedures and guidance material to enable managers and supervisors to ensure employees are protected from hazards and risks associated with extended working hours arrangements;
- Provide guidance and advice on the implementation of this procedure.

Procedure

Hazard Management

1. **Identify** reasonably foreseeable **hazards** related to working hours:
 - a. Gain an understanding of patterns, trends or peaks in hours worked and time work is undertaken. Consider number of hours worked and when they are worked, shift work that impacts on normal sleep patterns, demands of the work tasks, repetitive work, static work postures, physically demanding work, work demanding high concentration or cognition and peak workloads.
 - b. Identify any other risks in the workplace that could be increased when coupled with working hours, for example, driving, operating machinery, electrical work, work with flammable, explosive or other hazardous substances. Consider exposure to heat, noise, vibration or atmospheric contaminants.
 - c. Examine overtime claims, use of additional consultancy services, records of attendance at work (if applicable); consult supervisors, staff, health and safety representatives or committees, incident data and other university's experience.

2. **Assess** the level of **risk** associated with the identified hazards. This can be done by including consideration of the impact of working hours in any other risk assessment or considering the impact separately. Importantly the factors to include are: where is the risk, which and how many employees may be adversely affected, how often is this likely to occur, potential consequences and the extent to which working hours affect the risk.

When assessing the risk of any work task it is important that individuals who perform the work are involved, or at least represented, in the assessment process. They hold valuable knowledge of the detail of the work tasks and any associated hazards.

When conducting a risk assessment the following should be included:

- Analysis of records of previous incidents where working hours are a factor;
- Consulting employees, health and safety representatives and committees;
- Identifying factors associated with working hours;
- Considering information, research, codes, guidance and data from industry associations, unions or other similar businesses or sources such as the Safety and Wellbeing Team.

3. **Implement control measures** to eliminate or mitigate risk in the following order:
- a. Eliminate the hazard by removing it, for example, where long hours is the hazard consider employing extra staff and sharing the hours across all staff or reviewing work to determine if it is being conducted efficiently and effectively;
 - b. Substitute the hazard by replacing it with something less hazardous, for example changing the time of day work is performed to avoid the hazard of extreme heat in midsummer;
 - c. Isolate the hazard, or the person from the hazard;
 - d. Consider an engineering control where the above two options are not possible;
 - e. Administratively control the hazard through training, safe work practices and procedures. Consider training on job skills, and efficient methods to undertake the work, information, instruction and training on methods to minimise fatigue and expectations of employees; or
 - f. Provide personal protective equipment as a last choice, for example hearing or airway protection where a noise or airborne contaminant is prevalent and exposure is in excess of safe time limits;
 - g. Consider fitness and health in relation to ability to undertake the work safely; and
 - h. Consider the level of supervision required and supervisor understanding of strategies to minimise risk from working hours. Discourage cutting corners and enforce rest breaks.

4. **Review Effectiveness of Control Measures**

The control measure should be reviewed to ensure there are no unintended consequences and that the measure is effective. Review should occur within a reasonable time frame after implementation and periodically when work practices or staffing levels change significantly. If the review process indicates that the control measure is not effective revert to step 3.

When to risk assess

1. When this procedure is implemented;
2. When there is a significant change in the workplace;
3. When there is change in workloads;
4. When there is change in the way work is conducted;
5. When staffing arrangements change;
6. When planning an overseas trip where jet lag and interrupted sleep patterns are expected; or
7. Periodically, determined by the level of risk in the workplace.

The hazard management process described above should be documented through the use of the following: [Risk Assessment Tool \(WHS02\)](#)

Where there is involvement of overseas travel the following checklist should also be used: [Travel and Offshore Risk Assessment \(WHS14\)](#)

5. **Record Keeping**

Records of the implementation of this procedure must be kept in accordance with the University procedure for record management and document control.

Documents and Forms

Further advice on managing risks in university workplaces, including supporting documents and training courses are available on the Safety & Wellbeing website.

- [WHS02 - Risk assessment tool](#)
- [WHS14 - Travel and Offshore Risk Assessment](#)
- [Code of Good Practice: Research Degrees Management and Supervision](#)
- [Code of Good Practice: Student Behaviour](#)

References

- [Work Health and Safety Act & Regulations 2012 \(SA\)](#)