Fatigue Does Not Discriminate

Given that one-third of American adults sleep less than 7 hours each night,¹ it is not surprising that fatigue plays a role in our day-to-day lives. Fatigue is associated with numerous physical and mental health problems. Fatigue-induced errors in judgment and poor coordination can cause injuries and deaths. Errors caused by fatigue occur most often when fatigued people are performing monotonous activities which, if truth be told, can be found in almost all professions and walks of life.

Fatigue in the workplace is most frequently discussed in the transportation industry, but there is a direct connection between long working hours and fatigue in a host of other industries as well (e.g. construction, health care (including veterinarians), mining, fire-fighting, and nuclear power).² In addition, white-collar occupations demanding long work hours also risk errors of judgment and/or lapses of attention.³

CIRCADIAN has been involved in a number of cases involving fatigue in non-transportation industries. We have consulted in cases from a wide-variety of fields, involving different types of occupations and/or circumstances, but all carrying a common denominator: a fatigue-impaired error or consequence. For instance:

- A stay-awake contestant looking to win a truck who, after approximately 48 hours of staying awake with the aid of contest-provided energy drinks, began to hallucinate. He abruptly left the contest, broke into a near-by store, acquired a gun, and shot himself.

- A college student falls to his death from a balcony after experiencing “hazing week” that involved extraordinary waking hours, excess alcohol intake and physical punishment.

- A physician with an undiagnosed sleep disorder, who lost hospital privileges after having an unacceptable percentage of medical errors, fought to regain privileges after his sleep disorder was diagnosed and he demonstrated treatment compliance.

¹MMWR (Feb. 19, 2016) Prevalence of Healthy Sleep Duration among Adults – United States, 2014. 65(6); 137-141. [https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/65/wr/mm6506a1.htm?s_cid=mm6506a1_w](https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/65/wr/mm6506a1.htm?s_cid=mm6506a1_w)


• A government agent working extraordinary hours under extreme stress while on-call 24-7 succumbed to the pressure and profound fatigue. He committed suicide after taking one last call, early one morning.

• A carnival worker who worked extra shifts to set up and take down carnival rides and failed to take proper safety precautions. His error led to a child’s fatal fall from one of the rides.

As these cases demonstrate, fatigue may play a role in a wide range of matters and professions, and should never be overlooked as a potential factor. When evaluating your next case, remember to take issues of fatigue and fatigue-related errors into consideration.