



“Man, I Need a Nap!”

What's the issue?

Fatigue—everyone in the operational Navy experiences it. However, most people aren't very good at recognizing it in themselves and others. Plus, they don't appreciate how dangerous it can be.

What's going on?

You work a long, hard day with a hectic schedule, and what do you look forward to when it's time for some rest? A few hours of rack time in a space that is too bright and too noisy, and then you get to drag yourself up for a drill prior to standing the midwatch.

“I remember standing watch many times where I had to pace back and forth on the bridge; if I stood still for more than five seconds, I'd fall asleep while standing up,” one Sailor recalls.

You get used to not getting enough sleep, and usually everything is fine. But fatigue can move from a minor discomfort to an actual hazard. People get short-tempered, depressed or anxious. They feel less motivated. They react more slowly and are less vigilant. They make bad decisions and lose situational awareness. When you are extremely tired, you have the same decision-making capacity as someone who has had a few drinks. Would you let a DUI Sailor take the watch?

Fatigue often is not recognized as a mishap cause. It masquerades as complacency, inattention, distraction, task-fixation, or boredom. Eighty to 85% of mishaps are caused by “human factors” errors; many are fatigue-related.

Most of us have experienced fatigue while driving: involuntarily closing our eyes, yawning, letting the car drift back and forth in our lane. Either we smarten up and stop for a break, or we wake up in the median, off the shoulder, or plastered to the back of a parked car. The same thing can happen on a ship, around aircraft, or with moving machinery.

What's the solution?

Several things can be done to control fatigue:

- Fatigue and stress are closely related. Your command should develop well-monitored drill situations that place your personnel under controlled conditions, so that they and

their leadership can identify and react to stress and fatigue.

- Physical fitness is closely related to stress and fatigue. Having a command environment that supports good physical readiness may enhance your Sailors' ability to stay in the fight when uncontrollable stress and fatigue situations arise.

- Know your Sailors' after-work plans and home environment—this will aid you in identifying those at risk. A Sailor with marital troubles or other off-duty stressors may become fatigued more quickly than normal.

- Command climate and policies must be conducive to personnel getting needed sleep. Even a cat nap can go a long way.

- Recreation and socializing are important, but people also need to take advantage of their chances to relax and sleep.

- Consider your Sailors and their fatigue level when scheduling and planning missions.

- Off-duty, if you are planning a trip or a night out, try to stay off the road between 2400 and 0600. There is a strong relationship between time of day and traffic accidents. It isn't necessarily how long you have driven as what time you are driving.

- Learn to recognize the symptoms of fatigue in yourselves and those around you.

Discussion Items and Open Questions

1. Does the Navy recognize fatigue as a problem? If not, why?
2. What is the most tired you ever have been on the job? Did anything happen as a result?
3. Do you ever nod off at the wheel? Why did you put yourself in this position?

Note: The Friday Funnies often talks about falling asleep at the wheel as “The World's Worst Alarm Clock.” You can find an entire collection at http://www.safetycenter.navy.mil/funnies/collections/Zzzz_Crash.asp. Also, check out the messages for February #4 and 5.

Supervisors: Use this page to guide safety discussions with your personnel