

Wake up to fatigue, says Transport Committee



Photo: Mike Burton, Newspix.

♥Your survival capabilities are non-existent. Worst of all you just don't think straight. In other words you're an accident waiting for somewhere to happen.♥

Submission to the House Transport Committee

We now live in a world where commerce is conducted around the clock and by the click of a mouse – a world where goods and services are expected to be available when and where the customer wants.

The convenience of this twenty-four hour world comes at a cost. This cost is human fatigue.

Human fatigue has been recognised as one of the major safety concerns facing the transport industry. The issue also has enormous ramifications for public safety. The transport industry touches us all in one way or another, whether by sharing the road with semi-trailers, flying in a plane or relying on the transport industry to get goods into the stores when we want them.

On 9 October 2000 the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications, Transport and the Arts released its eagerly awaited report, *Beyond the Midnight Oil: Managing Fatigue in Transport*. This report was the culmination of 12 months of extensive work by the House Transport Committee, including 15 public hearings and over 115 submissions.

'Fatigue related road accidents cost as high as \$3 billion annually.'

Broad ranging research into the key contributors to workplace impairment suggests that fatigue is four times more likely as a cause of impairment than drugs or alcohol.

In the absence of measures to mitigate the risk of fatigue, a lethal continuum is created. We frequently hear of accidents and incidents on roads, on railways, at sea and in the air where human fatigue is cited as a contributing factor. The consequences of such accidents can be catastrophic and enduring. Individuals and families can be traumatised, communities scarred, environments damaged and businesses destroyed. The Australian community pays a high price for not managing fatigue properly. The annual financial cost to the community of fatigue related road accidents alone is estimated to be as high as \$3 billion.

"The title of the report, *Beyond the Midnight Oil*, reflects the fact that many of us are already burning the midnight oil by regularly working long hours. What we found in the transport industry is that many workers are working way beyond what are reasonable and safe hours of work," said Paul Neville, Chair of the House Transport Committee and Member for Hinkler (Queensland).

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This was a wide-ranging inquiry, covering the main forms of transport – air, sea, road and rail – as well as related support services such as aircraft maintenance. It extended beyond the drivers and pilots to include company managers, freight forwarders and the customers of the transport industry.

Major recommendations in the report include the following:

- introduce an operator accreditation scheme for the road transport industry;
- make driving or operating a vehicle while fatigued an offence, similar to laws regarding alcohol and driving;
- introduce a drug free policy into the transport industry and require all road transport companies to institute and administer random drug testing;
- amend the Road Transport Reform (Driving Hours) Regulations to incorporate time of day considerations and increase the minimum allowable rest periods;
- build fatigue management into the basic aviation regulatory mechanisms, such as Air Operator Certification;
- urgently develop hours of duty rules for aircraft maintenance engineers, incorporating sound fatigue management principles and fatigue management systems that can be audited;
- urgently improve the auditing functions of the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA);
- adopt the Safe-T-Cam system nationally;
- declare a national occupational health and safety standard on fatigue along with a corresponding code of practice; and
- develop effective codes of practice on how best to manage fatigue for all sectors of the transport industry.

The House Transport Committee found that although there is much good work being done by governments and industry to

manage the problem of fatigue, in the form of regulatory reform and industry initiatives, fatigue is still endemic throughout the industry. The Committee heard from truck drivers, aircraft pilots, train drivers, marine pilots and aircraft mechanics. They all raised fatigue as a problem.

'The costs are too great to ignore.'

The broad sweep approach adopted by the House Transport Committee revealed that better management of fatigue required many things: better training and support; better work practices; better job scheduling; more effective regulation; and better awareness of optimal work and rest patterns. A key finding of the inquiry was the impact that transport company managers and customers have on the level of fatigue in the industry and the important role they have in helping to alleviate the problem.

"But first and foremost," observed Mr Neville, "better management of fatigue requires that governments and all players in the industry recognise the scale of the problem and accept responsibility for improving the way it is managed. The commercial costs, the environmental costs and, above all, the human costs of not accepting this responsibility are too great to ignore."

For more information on the report *Beyond the Midnight Oil: Managing Fatigue in Transport*

Visit: www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/cta

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Copies of the report can be purchased from AusInfo Shops in all capital cities or by telephoning AusInfo, free call 132 447.



Members of the House of Representatives Transport Committee at the launch of their report, Beyond the Midnight Oil: Managing Fatigue in Transport.