

ANOTHER SLEEPLESS NIGHT? – WILL THIS STORM EVER END?

Or

THE MONEY'S GOOD BUT THE SLEEP ISN'T

Or

MAILBOX MASSACRE

By:

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The employer should be providing rest opportunities for snowplow operators at the place of employment in an area suitable for sleeping. What? Do you realize what that will cost? The roads will never be cleared! The health and welfare of the employees must take precedence over these items. Communities think little of paying a full-time fire department for 24-hour protection (yes, firefighters sleep) yet monetary issues seem to be raised when it comes to allowing public works employees to “sleep on the job.” This pattern of thought needs to be broken.

Several highway and public works departments, Hopkinton in particular, do provide a sleeping environment at the facility. Limits are placed on hours of continuous operation and operators are brought in off the road for mandatory rest periods. Dave Story, Hopkinton Public Works Superintendent, has been pleased with the results. He has purchased comfortable cots and provides a sleeping area at the highway garage. Dave was able to justify the purchase of the cots to the Budget Committee and Board of Selectmen by showing the safety and productivity advantages of having a well rested employee.

Obviously, there are no quick solutions to the “all-nighter.” Yet, by understanding how your body works and how best to treat it, we hope that you will feel better, be more productive and, most importantly, be safe.

EATING SMARTLY

During nighttime hours, your body wants to sleep. In doing so, it slows down. Your digestive system also rests. The very last thing you need is a big meal – especially one that includes greasy, spicy, or heavy protein foods. That “Big Mac” and fries, “Whopper” and onion rings, even that “whole wheat” donut will just sit there. You’ll feel tired and the stomach problems that can result may force you to ride with the windows down despite the blizzard and sub-zero temperatures!

Eating during evening and night hours requires special considerations. No, you won’t end up a “vegetarian” or a “granola head.” You can still eat well and enjoyably by planning well balanced meals and snacks. “The Shiftworker’s Handbook” again offers the following sound advice on nutrition.

NIGHT WORK

Working at night requires eating lighter, easy to digest foods. Poultry, fish, vegetables, fruit, and whole-grain breads and cereals are good choices. (Design a donut with slashed circle thru it) Reduce eating fats, butter, red meat, and fried foods. (Same symbol, with burger and fries). Always avoid spicy foods and rich desserts – your partner will thank you for it.

Breakfast (5-7 pm) – MAIN MEAL

This is the time for traditional “supper” type foods if you’re going to have them.

Light Protein (Chicken, turkey, fish, veal, cooked beans, peas)

Low Fats (No fried foods)

Carbohydrates (Vegetables, fruits, bread, pasta, potatoes)

Low-fat Dairy Products (Low-fat or skim milk, cheeses, yogurt)

(If you are planning to go back to sleep before work, make this a lighter meal.)

Work Meal Break

Soup and salad

-or-

Soup and light sandwich

-or-

Light protein and vegetables

Snacks (Before and During Work)

NO CAFFINE (Coffee and Tea) during second half of shift

Low-fat dairy products

Fruit

Popcorn

Cereal (granola is also OK)

Plain Cookies

Pretzels

Baked Crackers

Dried Fruit

Winter storms bring with them the potential for many problems – heavy snows, ice, slippery and freezing conditions, and equipment breakdowns. Few people, however, ever consider the impact that changes in schedules and lack of sleep have on those who make our roads passable during inclement weather – YOU! While most of us are fast asleep dreaming of clear roads and safe passage in the morning, you are out there battling snow, sleet, and sleep while trying to overcome hypnosis from the snow flying against the windshield.

Consider the following:

- The incident at Three-Mile occurred at 4:00 a.m.
- The Chernobyl Nuclear plant disaster and the Union Carbide chemical accident in Bhopal, India both occurred during the early morning hours.
- The Sunset Limited Amtrak train crash in Alabama on September 22, 1993 happened at approximately 3:00 a.m.
- The man at the helm of the Exxon Valdez when the ship struck an iceberg had slept only four of the previous 24 hours.
- At least 10,000 accidental deaths a year are sleep-related.
- 200,000 traffic accidents annually are due to driver fatigue.
- One-third of fatal truck accidents are due to lack of sleep.

This and other evidence points out that many serious accidents happen in a specific “lull” time in our daily wake/sleep cycle especially in the very early morning hours between 3:00 to 5:00 a.m. This time period is also the time when most single vehicle truck accidents occur, as do mistakes by telephone operators, postal workers, surgeons and nurses, railroaders, and practically anyone who works during these hours.

Those of you who work the usual daytime shift are probably well adapted to your schedule and, by all indications, less prone to accidents. It is the occasional Night Shift such as snow plowing that can lead to an injury due to the disruption of your “normal” schedule. Read on....

SO WHY DO I FEEL LIKE *&^@ AFTER A NIGHT OF PLOWING?

When you only work an occasional night, your body rhythms should be set on the regular day shift you work. Your goal is to isolate any disruption to body rhythms to one day.

Let's say you have been called out to plow at 1:00 a.m. and it takes until 5:30 a.m. to complete the route(s). This is all occurring during your regular sleep time. You know how that makes you feel!! “The Shiftworker's Handbook” by Marty Klein, Ph.D. of Synchro Tech in Lincoln, Nebraska offers some tips on how you can recover quickly and become “yourself” again:

THE OCCASIONAL NIGHT SHIFT

SUGGESTIONS:

- After working all night, come home and sleep for three or four hours, e.g., 8:00 a.m. to noon. Then force yourself to get up! This allows you to get at least a few hours of refreshing sleep without shifting your rhythms to a new time.

- That next night, you'll be sleepy enough to go to bed at your usual time. The next morning, you'll be able to get up at your usual time – fully recovered.

ADVANTAGES:

- You will have minimized any disruption to body rhythms.
- You will maintain consistency by returning to your normal sleep schedule the next night.

SPECIAL NOTES: Because your body is still on the day shift, you'll need to remember some special notes when working occasional nights:

- Eat lightly. Sample foods and drinks are listed at the end.
- Get at least 30 minutes of sleep right before going to work. This will help you maintain your alertness and performance throughout the night. This is especially true if you've worked a regular shift during the day and are called out that night for plowing; if the storm is several nights in duration; or if a series of storms come one after another.
- Be aware of your limitations. Everyone reacts and behaves differently. Many accidents are caused by ignoring sleepiness, or by letting your mood get the best of you. This is not the time to have a "Who Can Plow the Longest Contest."
- Take your time. While you may be under pressure to complete your route – think what happens when you have an accident! When alertness is low (those early morning hours), work carefully and deliberately.
- Use careful judgment. Think twice before making judgments or decisions. You're not in top decision-making form all night long! Going back and forth on the same street is a sign that you're not thinking!!!
- Follow procedures. Don't cut corners! Go by the book!
- Take breaks. Eat something good, roll down the window for fresh air, get out and move around.....a change of pace will feel good.
- Don't rely on others to stay alert. The wing man may be sound asleep and the last ten mailboxes are piled up in a snow bank!! If he or she is awake, chances are they feel much like you do. Help each other remain alert. Talk is cheap!

Before You Sleep (All Shifts)

If you sleep soon after getting off work, keep any bedtime snack small and light. If you do not sleep until later, the meal can be larger, but not heavier.

DO NOT eat heavy or hard to digest foods near, or right before, bedtime. This includes proteins, fried, fatty or spicy foods, and rich foods.

AVOID food and beverages containing caffeine within 4 hours of bedtime. If you must drink coffee, make it decaffeinated.

WE ALL KNOW WHAT SMOKING CIGARETTES AND CHEWING TOBACCO DOES – NICOTINE STIMULATES AND THE PRODUCTS IN THESE ITEMS CAN CAUSE CANCER. TRY TO CUT BACK, TRY TO QUIT.

ALCOHOL must not be consumed before or after snow plowing operations. During plowing operations – it is illegal. Prescription drugs which may cause drowsiness should also be avoided. Consult your medical professional for guidance on taking prescription medication.

YOU ARE VERY IMPORTANT AND MANY ARE DEPENDING ON YOU. TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF. YOU'LL FEEL BETTER AND WILL BE BETTER PREPARED FOR THE NEXT STORM. THINK SNOW – THINK OVERTIME \$\$\$ - THINK HEALTH.

WE'RE NOT GOING TO CHANGE YOUR BEHAVIOR, ATTITUDE OR DIET WITH ONE TRAINING SESSION OR A SINGLE ARTICLE – WE KNOW BETTER THAN THAT. WE DO, HOWEVER, WANT YOU TO HAVE THE INFORMATION SO THAT YOU CAN TRY DIFFERENT THINGS. EXPERIMENT! YOU MAY FEEL BETTER FOR IT! TRY THE “OLD WAY” AND THEN THE “NEW WAY”. COMPARE! LET US KNOW IF IT WORKS!!