

Work environment – **General information**

15.01.09

Devising an effective and safe roster >

This information bulletin provides advice on the components of a rostering system which would enhance the provision of a safe workplace.

Legislation

The [Workplace Health and Safety Act](#) outlines the responsibilities of employers to provide a safe workplace for both workers and other people (section 55). The Act also outlines the responsibility of workers to take appropriate care of both their own health and safety and that of other people (Section 59). The physical workplace must be safe and the way in which the workers work must be safe (Sections 56 to 58).

Devising an effective, safe roster

Many health effects of shiftwork have now been identified. It is essential that rosters are designed to take into account health factors such as circadian rhythms, adequate rest periods and social needs. When planning a roster, safety factors should include:

- a work cycle that is no more than six (6) eight (8) hour shifts or four (4) twelve (12) hour shifts;
- avoid work cycles of more than seven (7) continuous days;
- move with the clock. Studies show it is safer to go from morning shift to afternoon shift to the night shift and to repeat the same cycle. It is easier for people to delay sleep than to go to bed earlier;
- limit the number of nights worked in succession. Rotating rosters with shift changes every two (2) or three (3) days is preferable to seven (7) day rotating rosters or fixed shifts;
- keep night work to a minimum. Three eight (8) hour or two (2) twelve (12) hour night shifts are the recommended maximum number of consecutive shifts, which should be worked. Rostered days off should not be in the middle of a night shift sequence;
- allow for two (2) free weekends in four (4);
- evaluate the length of shift according to the workload. Avoid long shifts when there is excess heat, cold, noise, vibration, manual handling or exposure to hazardous substances. Occupational exposure levels are calculated as an average over an eight (8) hour day. When working longer shifts, exposure levels will need to be reassessed;
- try to avoid overtime before or after a night shift, a twelve (12) hour or double shift or when there is heavy mental and/or physical work involved;
- try not to start day shifts before 6.00am and allow some flexibility in start times if the work allows it;
- have a minimum of eleven (11) hours between shifts, preferably twelve(12);
- make sure there is adequate handover time between each shift to allow briefings between workers; and
- try to give workers at least one weeks notice of their roster, longer if possible.

This information bulletin is based on Shiftwork: How to devise an effective Roster, Workcover NSW.

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