

FATIGUE

According to the definition given by the IMO, Fatigue is a state of feeling tired, weary, or sleepy that results from prolonged mental or physical work, extended periods of anxiety,

exposure to harsh environments, or loss of sleep. The effects of fatigue are impaired performance and diminished alertness.

In other words, something is happening which is harming the physical and mental wellbeing of the sufferer. For seafarers this is most likely to be overwork, long and irregular hours resulting in lack of sleep. But the situation will be made worse by many other factors often faced by seafarers, for example:

- Loneliness, lack of communication with home, social interaction etc
- Isolation
- Safety issues with the vessel
- A lack of personal protective equipment
- Issues with non-payment of wages
- Inadequate and/or poor-quality food
- Risks such as piracy
- Repatriation delays following completion of contracts.

These and other factors can cause anxiety, stress and even depression, and when these induce fatigue it is not a stigma and seafarers need to look for counselling at early stages .

When seafarers are surveyed, they consistently highlight fatigue as a major issue affecting their working environment. One study, Project HORIZON demonstrated that sleepiness levels for some watch-keeping regimes are high, and actual sleep can occur.

Seafarers are increasingly expected to take on heavier workloads with less crew support, and to work longer hours with less time off – on board or on shore – to recuperate.

MLC 2006 states that the competent authority in ratifying countries should ensure that the national guidelines for the management of occupational safety and health address the physical and mental effects of fatigue.



MLC 2006 identifies that standard working hours are 8 hours per day, with one day of rest per week and additional rests on public holidays.

According to national rules, the employer must guarantee that crewmembers stick to maximum working hours or minimum resting time:

- The maximum working hours must not exceed 14 hours in any 24-hour period and 72 hours in any 7-day period
- The minimum resting time cannot be less than 10 hours in any 24-hour period and 77 hours in any 7-day period
- You can divide the hours of rest into a maximum of two parts. If you split the rest, one of the two rest periods must last at least 6 hours and the interval between consecutive rest periods cannot exceed 14 hours.

WHAT ARE THE DANGERS OF FATIGUE?

Safety at sea is more likely to be endangered as crews are not fully alert. The desire for sleep can encourage the taking of shortcuts. Health suffers, now and in the future, through taking poor care of one's physical and mental health needs.

ESTIMATES SUGGEST THAT 25% OF MARINE CASUALTIES ARE CAUSED BY FATIGUE.

Comprehensive research on seafarer fatigue shows how the long working hours culture takes its toll on seafarers:

- One in four seafarers said they had fallen asleep while on watch
- Almost 50% of seafarers taking part in a study reported working weeks of 85 hours or more

- Around half said their working hours had increased over the past 10 years, despite regulations intended to combat fatigue
- Almost 50% of seafarers surveyed considered their working hours presented a danger to their personal safety
- Some 37% said their working hours sometimes posed a danger to the safe operations of their ship.

WHAT ABOUT ON-BOARD RECORDS?

Increased workloads lead to another problem - false record keeping. Seafarers are either bowing to the pressures of the job - or being forced - to falsify the records of the hours they actually work. This practice undermines onboard safety and health - and makes the problem of long hours working and crew fatigue harder to address.

HOW CAN SEAFARERS COPE WITH FATIGUE?

The symptoms of fatigue can endanger yourself, your colleagues, your ship and the marine environment. The danger signs include:

- Inability to stay awake
- Clumsiness
- Headaches and giddiness
- Loss of appetite
- Insomnia
- Moodiness and needless worrying
- Poor judgement of distance, speed, time and risk
- Slow responses
- Difficulty concentrating

If you become aware of these signs, you should take the following steps:

- Use your maximum allowance of sleep, rest and leisure time
- Inform your supervisor if you think fatigue may be impairing your performance
- Where possible, rotate your tasks to mix heavy and lighter duties
- Exercise daily
- Eat as healthily as possible, limit smoking, caffeine and alcohol consumption.

WHAT IS THE ITF DOING?

The ITF campaign against fatigue at sea argues for:

- **Safe crewing levels on board ship**
- **Enforcement of maritime regulations on minimum hours of rest and/or maximum hours of work**
- **Universal recognition of the right of all seafarers to shore leave**
- **An onboard safety cultures**
- **Fatigue to be treated as a serious health and safety issue.**

If any of the issues identified are affecting your well-being you have the right to contact your trade union, an ITF Inspector or the ITF Seafarers Support team for assistance. Don't wait until it's too late.



ITF Seafarers
Your port of call online

Website: www.itfseafarers.org

Email: seafsupport@itf.org.uk

Facebook: [itfseafarerssupport](https://www.facebook.com/itfseafarerssupport)