



Top Compliance (Pty) Ltd

Occupational Health and Safety

Your business' safety is our concern

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Stress and fatigue the overlooked workplace hazard

In the field of occupational health and safety, much attention is given to physical hazards such as machinery, chemicals, heights, slips, trips and falls. Yet, one of the most insidious threats to worker health and organisational performance is often overlooked: stress and fatigue. These psychosocial hazards silently undermine concentration, judgment, and productivity, and they are as capable of causing injury or illness as any mechanical fault.

According to the [Occupational Health and Safety Act \(Act 85 of 1993\)](#), Section 8(1) places a duty on every employer to provide and maintain, as far as is reasonably practicable, a working environment that is safe and without risk to the health of employees. “Health” in this context includes *mental and emotional well-being*, not merely the absence of physical injury. The employer’s legal obligation extends to identifying all hazards which including psychosocial ones and implementing suitable preventive measures.

Workplace fatigue and chronic stress are not simply matters of personal resilience. They are systemic issues often rooted in organisational design, workload, and culture. The International Labour Organization (ILO) reports that work-related stress contributes to a growing percentage of absenteeism, burnout, and workplace accidents worldwide. Locally, the South African Society of Psychiatrists (SASOP) has repeatedly highlighted the increase in work-induced mental health issues, particularly in high-pressure industries such as healthcare, education, and manufacturing sectors that Top Compliance actively serves.

[Workplace culture is a major factor](#): SASOP member and psychiatrist Dr. Siki Gwanya-Mdletye states that while work can provide purpose and satisfaction, an unhealthy organizational culture can worsen mental illness for vulnerable employees. This can be driven by high work demands and blurred boundaries caused by the prevalence of hybrid and remote work.

Under Section 8(2)(d) of the OHS Act, employers must “establish, as far as is reasonably practicable, what hazards to the health and safety of persons are attached to any work which is performed.” This includes psychological hazards such as excessive workloads, shift work, poor supervision, and lack of role clarity are all known precursors to fatigue and stress.

Furthermore, Section 14(1) places a duty on employees to take care of their own health and safety, which includes recognising and reporting symptoms of overwork and stress. A workplace culture that discourages reporting or glorifies overwork may therefore be indirectly non-compliant.

Managing stress and fatigue

Top Compliance encourages a systemic approach to managing psychosocial hazards through the same hierarchy of controls applied to physical risks:

- Eliminate: Remove excessive or unnecessary work demands, limit overtime, and avoid double-shifting where possible.
- Substitute: Rotate tasks and implement job-sharing arrangements to distribute cognitive load.
- Engineering Controls: Ensure adequate lighting, ventilation, and ergonomic design of workstations to reduce physical strain and fatigue.
- Administrative Controls: Implement fatigue management policies, rest breaks, and mental health awareness training. Encourage supervisors to monitor workloads and recognise early signs of stress.
- PPE (Personal Protective Equipment): While PPE cannot prevent stress directly, providing proper safety gear reduces physical discomfort and indirectly contributes to mental well-being.

Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs) is an effective way to manage workplace stress and fatigue. EAPs are confidential, employer-sponsored support systems designed to help employees address personal or work-related problems that may affect their performance, mental health, or overall well-being. In line with Section 8(2)(b) of the Occupational Health and Safety Act 85 of 1993 requires employers to provide information, instruction, training, and supervision necessary to ensure health and safety. An EAP serves as a proactive mechanism to support psychological resilience and early intervention.

A well-functioning EAP can provide access to professional counselling, trauma debriefing after critical incidents, substance abuse support, and referrals for ongoing mental health care. For industries where exposure to trauma, long hours, or emotional strain is common, such as healthcare, manufacturing, and education, the benefits are substantial. EAPs reduce absenteeism, improve morale, and enhance productivity by equipping employees with coping mechanisms and professional guidance.

From a compliance standpoint, implementing an EAP demonstrates an employer's commitment to the "reasonably practicable" standard outlined in Section 8(1) of the OHS Act. It reinforces a duty of care beyond physical safety, extending into psychosocial health management. Moreover, the confidentiality of EAP services encourages employees to seek help early without fear of stigma or workplace repercussions.

Achieving a healthy balance between work and personal life is not merely a lifestyle goal it's a safety imperative. Employers can promote work-life balance by:

- Encouraging employees to take annual leave regularly.
- Scheduling breaks and providing quiet rest areas for recovery.
- Offering flexible work arrangements where operationally feasible.
- Recognising and rewarding productivity over presenteeism.

Employees, too, bear responsibility. Setting personal boundaries, seeking support early, maintaining good sleep hygiene, and engaging in physical activity are all proven strategies to combat fatigue and maintain resilience.

Education is one of the strongest defences against workplace stress and fatigue. Training equips both management and employees with the skills to identify early warning signs and intervene appropriately.

Encouraging proactive hazard reporting is critical. An effective reporting system should allow employees to raise concerns about workload, fatigue, or stress without fear of reprisal. This aligns with the spirit of Section 14(d) of the OHS Act, which requires employees to report unsafe or unhealthy conditions to their employer or health and safety representative.

Addressing stress and fatigue requires a cultural shift from viewing them as personal weaknesses to recognising them as legitimate occupational hazards. Organisations that actively manage psychosocial risks not only meet their legal obligations but also foster healthier, more productive, and more loyal workforces.

Should you require further assistance or advice feel free to email us on info@topcompliance.co.za

Yours in Health and Safety

 A hand holding a magnifying glass over the text 'Safety Auditing'. Surrounding text includes: SAFETY & HEALTH, BEST PRACTICE, RESPONSIBILITY, AWARENESS, COMPLIANCE, STANDARDS, COMMITTEE, AUDIT, POLICY, GUIDELINES, REGULATION.		 A red shopping cart icon next to the text 'SHOP ONLINE' with a mouse cursor arrow pointing at it.		
Occupational health and safety auditing and consulting		Online safety shop		
				
Appointments, checklists and templates	First aid equipment	Signage	Legal posters	Safety Equipment

Courses offered by Top Compliance (Pty) Ltd

ONLINE ACADEMY - https://academy.topcompliance.co.za/		
Occupational Health and Safety Courses	Online	Onsite Excluding travel
Safety representative – Legal Liability	R980.00	R1300.00
The Occupational Health and Safety Act & responsibilities of management – Legal Liability	R1250.00	R 1730.00
Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment	R735.00	R875.00
Food facility health & safety course in terms of R638	R735.00	R875.00
Basic Ladder Safety Course	R735.00	R875.00
Fire Fighting and Prevention Courses		
Fire Marshal - Basic firefighting	R735.00	R875.00
Fire & Evacuation marshal - Basic firefighting with emergency action planning	R810.00	R950.00
First aid		
Level 1 - US 119567 - Perform basic life support and first aid procedures – THEORY MODULE	R400.00	-

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Occupational Health and Safety Courses		
Safety representative – Legal Liability		
The Occupational Health and Safety Act & responsibilities of management – Legal Liability		
Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment		
Food facility health & safety course in terms of R638		
Basic Ladder Safety Course		
Fire Fighting and Prevention Courses		
Fire Marshal - Basic firefighting		
Fire & Evacuation marshal - Basic firefighting with emergency action planning		

ONSITE TRAINING	
First Aid Courses:	
Level 1 - US 119567 - Perform basic life support and first aid procedures	2 days
Level 2 - US 120496 - Provide risk-based primary emergency care/first aid in the workplace	3 days
Level 3 - US 376480 - Provide first aid as an advanced first responder	3 days
Level 1 & 2 - US 119567 & 120496	3 days
Level 1, 2 & 3 - US 119567, 120496 & 376480	5 days
Level 2 & 3 - US 120496 & 376480	3 days
Child and infant CPR & choking	6 hours
Adult CPR & choking	6 hours
Adult CPR & choking and AED	1 day
Occupational Health and Safety Courses	
Safety representative – Legal Liability	1 day
The Occupational Health and Safety Act & responsibilities of management – Legal Liability	1 day
Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment	1 day
Food facility health & safety course in terms of R638	6 hours

Basic Ladder Safety	6 hours
Fire Fighting and Prevention Courses	
Fire Marshal - Basic firefighting	6 hours
Fire & Evacuation marshal - Basic firefighting with emergency action planning	1 day