

# VOLTS Newsletter

*VALUING OUR LIVES THROUGH SAFETY*

May 2020, Volume 78

Casey Draper, Facilitator

Amy White, Editor



## *Stress and Fatigue—by Kirk Stevens*

It was 5 a.m., dead quiet, and the last of the four night shifts in the Coal Yard Control Room. There were no trains and everything was running as designed. I was sitting at the table, waiting for something to break, or better yet, for relief to arrive—whichever came first. Next thing I knew, I was being asked if I was going to go. Go where I wondered. Home? Was it that time already? I looked at the clock and it said 5:30 a.m. I must have looked confused, because I was asked again if I was going to go. I was becoming very confused, and a bit frustrated! “Go where?” I asked. “Aren’t you on the fire brigade?” he asked. “Yes.” I replied incredulously trying to figure out what that had to do with anything. “Why?” “The CO just called for the Fire Brigade to muster. There is a fire in Bottom Ash... ‘A’ mill is on fire.”

That was when it all became clear. I had gone completely out—I mean dead to the world. I didn’t even hear the radio call with the mic right next to my ear! I know I am not the only one who has been so sleep deprived that my body just said, “NOPE! You’re done for a minute.” I don’t remember working particularly hard physically those four nights. Why was I so fatigued?

For all of us, fatigue—caused by lack of good, quality sleep—is something very real in our lives. Some of us work crazy shifts, some have little children at home, and some of us are at an age where sleep just doesn’t come easy no matter what we do. Stress is also a big contributor to fatigue. COVID-19, or as my son put it, the corona, has put our lives into a bit of a tailspin

lately. Our daily routines have been interrupted, which in turn causes our bodies and minds stress. Thoughts of the unknown can produce anxiety in our lives. These factors contribute to how stressed and fatigued we are...mentally and physically.

Mental fatigue is a common cause of accidents in the workplace, and sleep is the remedy most often recommended by professionals. Did you know that cognitive fatigue is a known precursor of serious injuries, fatalities, and accidents? Did you know that if you get less than 6 hours of sleep in a 24-hour period you are 5 times more likely to make a mistake? Did you know that moderate to severe fatigue is compared to a 0.04-0.12 blood-alcohol level (0.05 percent is the legal limit in Utah).

Here are some queues that help us know when we should focus on our sleep a bit more:

- Chronic tiredness or sleepiness
- Headache
- Dizziness
- Slowed reflexes and responses
- Impaired decision-making and judgement
- Moodiness, such as irritability
- Impaired hand-to-eye coordination
- Short-term memory problems
- Poor concentration
- Hallucinations
- Reduced ability to pay attention to the situation at hand
- Low motivation

## Stress and Fatigue (cont.)—by Kirk Stevens

DEKRA stated the following in the article *Brain Fatigue: The Hidden Danger*. “At a minimum, daily time away from work needs to be 10 hours in length to allow for commute time, wind-down time, optimally a meal with family, and critically, at least 6.5 or 7 hours of sleep. On a weekly basis, the goal has to be prevention of cumulative cognitive fatigue due to long consecutive work periods. Achieving this end necessitates at least two uninterrupted sleep periods following every work block, with more rest and recovery time required after four or more consecutive night shifts.”

What are some things we can do to deal with the stress and fatigue in our lives? The CDC (Center for Disease Control) has these suggestions for coping with stress:

- Take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories, including social media. (Hearing about the pandemic repeatedly can be upsetting.)
- Take care of your body.
  - \* Take deep breaths, stretch, or meditate.
  - \* Try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals.
  - \* Exercise regularly; get plenty of sleep.
  - \* Avoid alcohol and drugs.
- Make time to unwind. Try to do some other activities you enjoy.

• Connect with others. Talk with people you trust about your concerns and how you are feeling. In short, I may as well have been drunk while at work that morning in the Coal Yard. The moral of the story is that we all need to take stress and fatigue more seriously in our lives in order to stay safe both in the workplace and at home. It is too easy to allow others to dictate what is most important in our lives, and we get stretched pretty thin between family, work, social, or civic duties which can cause stress and a lack of pillow time. It is wise to step back and re-evaluate your need for rest and de-stressification (my new word). What are some behavioral adjustments you could make that would produce large dividends toward being a healthier, safer person? Who in your life needs you to be stress free, awake, and alert while at work today? What is your why?

CDC Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (April 30, 2020). Stress and Coping. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managing-stress-anxiety.html>

DEKRA Organizational Safety and Reliability (2018). Brain Fatigue: The Hidden Danger. <http://dekra-insight.com/images/white-paper-documents/WP-Brain-Fatigue-The->

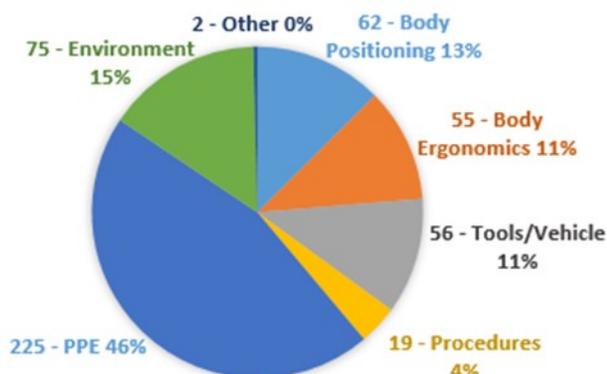
## VOLTS Data Report—Casey Draper



### April Report Summary

VOLTS Contact Rate (Performance Incentive Goal is to Remain Above 1)	1.3
Observations Performed	487
Protected Work Behaviors Observed	5,790
Exposed Work Behaviors Observed	40

### APRIL 2019 TOTAL PPE PERCENTAGE OF 494 EXPOSED BEHAVIORS FOR SIX MONTHS



### APRIL 2020 TOTAL PPE PERCENTAGE OF 379 EXPOSED BEHAVIORS FOR SIX MONTHS

