Emerging issues in fatigue and fatigue management in Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing

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The findings and conclusions in this presentation are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
Why are “best practices” often incompatible with AgFF work?
Agriculture, forestry, and fishing workers in the US

Crop agriculture

Seafood processing

Aquaculture

Commercial fishing

Forestry

Mariculture

Livestock agriculture

Photo sources: NIOSH, Getty Images
What is the current state of fatigue research in AgFF?
Unique AgFF factors for work hours, sleep, and fatigue

Extended work hours

Economic and organizational factors

Environmental factors

Photo sources: Getty Images, NIOSH
Unique AgFF factors for work hours, sleep, and fatigue

Always “at work”
Sub-standard Housing
Health Disparities

Photo sources: familyfarmers.org, State of Washington
Long hours and sleep loss are engrained in the culture
AgFF workers want to be safe...

But there’s often only one thing that can budge...
How can we flip the script on fatigue?
We must change the way we talk and educate on fatigue.

- **Change the cultural norm** that fatigue is inevitable, a weakness, or even a personal/moral failing.

- **Find new words and measurements** for fatigue.

- **Teach the benefits of sleep**, not just the risks of going without it.
Sleep is a tactical advantage.

- Concentration
- Judgement
- Safety
- Problem Solving
- Decision Making
- Calm
- Recovery
- Motivation
- Coping
- Reaction and Response Time

NIOSH AgFF Program and Partners: Flipping the Script

- **NIOSH Strategic Plan:**
  - Healthy Work Design goal for AgFF

- **NIOSH Agriculture Centers**
  - FY2022 Renewal

- **NIOSH and US Coast Guard Fishing Safety Grants:**
  - Assessments of Sleep Deprivation and Associated Health and Cognitive Impacts in Commercial Fishermen

Photo source: Getty Images
The ideal in AgFF fatigue intervention development

- Community-based development, consultation, evaluation
- Culturally competent and sympathetic
- Focuses on fatigue management, not sleep
- Works from a place of harm reduction, not best practices
- Easily implemented by individuals and small business
Summary

- AgFF workers face financial and regulatory pressures, several health disparities, an aging workforce, increased stress, and at the same time, work in unpredictable, harsh environments.

- Best practices (ideal sleep habits) are often unattainable: not culturally, not economically, not even realistically.

- AgFF workers want to be safe and realize the dangers of fatigue, but they do not yet have the tools and training to respond appropriately.

- Fatigue management solutions must help AgFF prepare for both acute fatigue incidents and persistent chronic fatigue in order to mitigate risk (harm reduction) while addressing the sector’s unique challenges and diverse workspaces.
Questions

- How to do we encourage behavioral change and improve our outreach in a culture that believes long work hours and fatigue as inevitable, or even a badge of honor, and where long work hours cannot be avoided due to the nature of the work?

- Given our limited resources, how can we support our NIOSH Agricultural Centers to do more in this area?
Thank you!

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