

NIOSH Develops Fatigue Prevention Training for Alaska Pilots



NIOSH recently released a fatigue prevention training program for commercial pilots in Alaska. Why the focus on Alaska?

Pilots working in Western Alaska serve as a transportation link to more than 250 villages across the state. Vast distances, long hours of daylight, short flying seasons, and wildly variable weather can all contribute to the development of fatigue, which can cause or contribute to plane crashes. And these factors also apply to pilots in Canada's northern territories.

Fatigue has repeatedly been shown to be an important risk factor for aviation accidents. For example, a NASA survey of regional airline pilots found that 89% of respondents identified fatigue as a moderate or serious concern, 88% reported that fatigue was a common occurrence, and 86% said they'd gotten no training from their companies that addressed fatigue.

When NIOSH researchers talked to pilots and management of commuter and air taxi companies in Alaska, they found that there were certain situations that could create higher risks for fatigue, such as extended duty days during the summer, longer amounts of daylight disrupting sleep cycles, and long-term remote operations at bush camps.

In response, NIOSH released a fatigue prevention training program tailored to commercial pilots in Alaska. All videos were filmed in Alaska, and feature real pilots and aviation workers with Alaskan aircraft. The training can be used individually by pilots, or in a group setting by companies as part of their initial or recurrent training programs.

The computer-based training is self-paced and provides information through four modules, focusing on the risks and hazards associated with fatigue, the importance of good sleep, tips for getting good sleep, and preventing fatigue. You can download it from the NIOSH Aviation Topic Page. Safety professionals for aviation companies in northern Canada could benefit from reviewing this training and providing it to their pilots.

The OHS Insider has information and resources all employers can use to prevent fatigue from impacting workers' job performance and endangering their safety,

including:

- How fatigue may be a factor in traffic accidents and train derailments
- The impact of sleep apnea on worker safety
- Implementing a fatigue risk management system
- A Model Fatigue Management Policy
- A Model Notice on the signs of fatigue
- Fatigue Hazards Identification Checklist
- Fatigue Self-Reporting Form
- A worker fatigue infographic.

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