



Shift Work

Information for SIAST Students

1. What is shift work?

Shift work usually means regularly scheduled work outside of the normal daytime working hours of 7:00 A.M. to 6:00 P.M. and includes permanent night shifts, condensed work weeks, and variable or rotating shifts.

2. What are the hazards?

Shift workers have irregular patterns of eating, sleeping, working, and socializing that may cause occupational health and social problems. Some shift workers are more likely to encounter violent situations while working alone.

Shift work often involves working for more than 8 hours a day. These extended shifts can expose workers to more chemical and biological substances, noise, vibration, and temperature extremes.

Disrupted sleep and eating patterns can result in sleep and stress-related disorders and affect the cardiovascular system. Stresses brought on by shift work may reduce alertness and increase the risk of accidents.

3. How can hazards be controlled?

Saskatchewan's occupational health and safety laws require the employer, with help from the workplace's occupational health committee, to:

- assess the risks to the worker's health and safety posed by the work; and
- inform the worker about the nature and extent of the risks and how to eliminate or reduce them.

Here are five common hazard controls.

1. **Organizational controls** – Limit shift work to essential jobs. Organize workloads so that the toughest and most dangerous tasks are completed early in the shift. Schedule less demanding tasks for late in the shift. Avoid scheduling demanding or dangerous tasks at the beginning of an early

morning shift. Make sure workers are closely supervised, particularly between 3:30 A.M. and 5:30 A.M. Provide adequate meal facilities and breaks. Develop and implement effective emergency response procedures.

2. **Shift scheduling** – Fewer adverse effects are likely to occur when workers have the opportunity to choose shifts and/or help design shift schedules.

Where possible, the employer should offer alternate shift schedules to any worker who cannot adapt to a particular shift or who is more susceptible to the hazards of shift work, especially if the worker involved is pregnant or has a chronic illness.

3. **Workplace design** – Workplace design can improve conditions for shift workers by:

- Reducing night traffic, noise, and distractions.
- Designing work areas to eliminate or reduce exposure to physical, chemical, and biological hazards.
- Maximizing occupational health and safety engineering controls. For example, the employer can provide good ventilation, temperature control, machine guarding, etc.

4. **Worker training** – Instruct workers:

- How to recognize the symptoms of poor health that may be related to shift work.
- How to control shift work hazards by using organizational controls, shift scheduling and workplace design.
- How to minimize the harmful effects of shift work.

5. **Implement violence and working alone policies** – Use publications provided by the Occupational Health and Safety Division for guidance.

You can learn more by reading the Occupational Health and Safety Division's publication *Managing Shiftwork*. It is available from the office in Regina or through Saskatchewan Labour's website.

To contact the Occupational Health and Safety Division:

Visit our website: www.labour.gov.sk.ca

Regina call: 1-800-567-7233 (toll-free). **Saskatoon** call: 1-800-667-5023 (toll-free)