

# HEALTH & WELLNESS

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## Subject: Fatigue Countermeasures and Alertness

Railroads, Labor, FRA and Sleep Experts have combined their knowledge and resources and to develop a very informative, interesting and valuable web site that addresses **sleep and fatigue** in the rail industry. The information offered through this web site is important to railroaders and their families because it can improve quality of life, help railroaders work more safely and enhance health. This briefing guide is designed to highlight some of the key elements on the web site and encourage railroaders and their families to view information found there.

The web site is called, *Railroaders' Guide to Healthy Sleep*, and is associated with the Harvard Medical School, which is one of the premier sleep research entities in the world. The web site includes video commentary from sleep experts, railroaders, and even railroad family members. Information on sleep cycles, approaches to improve quality of sleep and sleep disorder information is also offered.

Click on this web site address: <http://www.railroaderssleep.org/>

### Key sections of the *Railroaders' Guide to Healthy Sleep* Website

The web site offers an extensive amount of information and uses a menu type of approach so the user can choose what is most interesting. This menu approach is great, but there are a few sections all short line railroaders need to review as a priority. The sections are identified with a train  symbol.

### GETTING SLEEP



**Working the Rails:** In this six-minute video clip, locomotive engineer Mark Kramer discusses the importance of getting an adequate amount of sleep to support safe and alert job performance. Although Mark works for a Class I railroad where start times are typically less predictable than short lines, the message is applicable to all railroaders, especially those on extra-boards or who work afternoons or nights. It is a great clip to watch with family members. In fact, Mark says the main thing is “having a family that will help you try to get your rest” so you can perform your duties safely.



**Sleep Tips A to Zzzz:** This section outlines key strategies railroaders use to strive to get the sleep they need to perform their jobs well, take part in family and community life, see friends, and participate in sports or other leisure activities. The tactics discussed in this section help railroaders improve their quality of life and sleep. The recommendations can make a positive impact on both work and home life.



**Sleep Drive, Naps and Caffeine:** The need for sleep increases as the hours a person is awake grow. The section describes this relationship, speaks to the concept of strategic napping (allowed on some railroads, but is also applicable while off duty) and discusses the wise use of caffeine as an alertness tool.

**Listen To Your Body Clock:** This section discusses a person's internal clock and how it can affect how alert we are on the job. It explains how this internal clock interacts with the sleep drive that was discussed in the previous section. It offers important countermeasures to reduce fatigue and stay more alert when a person's body clock is in a down period and/or sleep drive is greater.

**How to Avoid Sleep Debt:** This section explains the significance of sleep debt and how it can impair performance. It allows the viewer to print out a “sleep diary” so they can estimate how much sleep they need. The section goes on to debunk many of the myths related to sleep and recommends ways to prevent sleep debt.

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## READ YOUR SIGNALS

**Stories from the Rails:** This six-minute video and written material offers six short stories from railroaders about how they manage their work schedules, organize their sleep, and balance work and family life. You may find a situation in these short stories that parallels some of the challenges in your life as it relates to achieving this balance, and can also find expert information from two sleep scientists.

 **Tips: Stay Safe on the Job:** Hours awake, sleep debt and a person's internal clock can dramatically affect the level of fatigue. Research shows that some sleep habits can put people in the danger zone, where reaction times can be ten (10) times slower, risk of falling asleep is high and judgment may be impaired. This section does a great job of explaining this relationship not only for railroaders, but for loved ones as well. All will likely find this section fascinating.

**Tools: Sleep-Wake Diary and More:** By maintaining a sleep-wake diary over a couple of weeks, people may be able to assess what helps and hurts their sleep and determine steps they can take to improve sleep. This section allows the user to print out a sleep diary, and two self-tests to evaluate their level of sleepiness. It also includes the anonymous Sleep Disorders Screening Tool that can be used by an individual to assess symptoms she/he may be experiencing, such as trouble falling asleep and staying asleep or snoring. Answers to this quiz will generate an estimate of the risk of having one or more sleep disorders. The results of this quiz will provide the user a recommendation as to whether it is prudent to see their physician or a sleep specialist.

**Quiz: How Well Do You Sleep:** This section provides a link to and additional information on the Anonymous Sleep Disorders Screening Tool, including answers to frequently asked questions.

**Game: Test Your Reaction Time:** This computer simulation tests the user's reaction time. It can be a fun exercise to compare reaction times based on perceived level of fatigue. It may also be of interest for family members or friends to identify who has the best reaction time.

## PROBLEMS? GET ON TRACK

**The Snoring Sickness: Obstructive Sleep Apnea:** More than 18 million Americans stop breathing dozens or even hundreds of times each night while they sleep. They have obstructive sleep apnea (OSA). This sleep disorder's most common symptom is snoring. In the video, railroad engineer Mark Kramer discusses how sleep apnea greatly increased his fatigue and how use of a CPAP machine has greatly enhanced the quality of his life.

**Could you Have Obstructive Sleep Apnea:** The video and animation provides information about obstructive sleep apnea and the negative effects it can have on a person's quality of life and safety. This is a must-view for anyone who thinks they may have obstructive sleep apnea.

**Other Sleep Problems and Their Treatment:** This section provides information on many of the sleep disorders that prevent people from achieving good quality sleep.

**Why Better Sleep = Better Health:** Written information and short video clips in this section examine the health consequences of insufficient sleep. Several Harvard doctors discuss health effects.

**Find a Sleep Center:** This section has links that provide the user information on sleep centers in the United States and Canada.

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## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS – Q&A

**Q. Do I put my employment at risk by taking a sleep survey and seeing a sleep specialist?**

A. Survey results remain anonymous. This said, working on the railroad requires good alertness and consulting with a sleep specialist for sleep issues is prudent to avoid injury to yourself, co-workers and the public. Sleep disorders can often be treated so that employees can work more safely and achieve a better quality of life.

**Q. I work for a short line railroad and typically have regular hours on my job. Is this sleep information still important for me?**

A. Absolutely! Even those individuals who have regular schedules need to understand the effects of their actions on their quality of sleep and alertness. The *Railroaders' Guide to Healthy Sleep* site can also be helpful to both railroaders and family members.

**Q. I normally sleep very well, so why should I take time out of my life to view this information?**

A. Even individuals who normally sleep well can get caught short on sleep and during certain times of the day and night even well rested people can become sleepy. The web site will teach the viewer about countermeasures that can be used to improve alertness. In addition, crew and workgroup members are responsible to look out for each other's safety and knowing what to look for and what alertness techniques are available can help people keep each other safe.

**Q. Most short line railroads do not allow napping on the job. Why have they taken this position when napping can improve alertness for several hours?**

A. Short line railroads typically have more predictable hours and fewer delays where train crews, maintenance of way, or others are delayed on sidings or can't get access to track. This reality creates minimal opportunities where napping is possible, so napping is often not allowed while on duty. Railroaders can still use strategic napping while off the job to keep themselves rested and improve alertness.

**Q. Am I required to view the information on the web site?**

A. The site is designed as a resource for railroaders and their families to use. Although some of the information on the website may be viewed as part of a job safety briefing or training class, it is really a resource for the viewer's benefit. Management, Labor and the FRA all hope that viewers take advantage of this valuable web site.

**Q. I am a very determined person and I have handled shortness of sleep for years. I think people who can't stay awake just don't have good discipline.**

A. Determination alone is not adequate to prevent decreased alertness during certain times of the day. The body's response to sleep debt is physiological and only through use of countermeasures and eventually sleeping to eliminate the sleep debt can a person's level of alertness be improved.