WHY IS SHIFT WORK AN IMPORTANT POLICY ISSUE?

Shift work has been linked to high levels of stress, poor health, and significant fatigue that can negatively impact on-the-job productivity and safety. While some employees use shift work as a strategic way to address caregiving and other personal needs, their own health may suffer as a result. State leaders can take steps that will help mitigate the deleterious effects of shift work on these employees.

WHAT IS SHIFT WORK?

Shift work refers to a job schedule in which employees work hours other than the standard hours of 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. or a schedule other than the standard workweek of Monday through Friday. One out of every five Americans in the labor force works during nonstandard times.

HOW DOES SHIFT WORK AFFECT WORKERS AND EMPLOYERS?

FOR WORKERS:

Shift workers are prone to an increase in physical health complaints such as sleep disturbances, fatigue, and gastrointestinal issues, as well as an increase in work accidents and work-family conflict.

FOR EMPLOYERS:

Fatigue and health problems common among shift workers can affect productivity, increase turnover, and create unsafe situations on the job.

- In 2005, Circadian found that 61% of facilities employing extended hours shift work reported moderate or severe fatigue problems at their facility. In 2007, that figure increased to 69%.
- Absenteeism and turnover in facilities that use extended hour shifts are three times higher than the U.S. average for all companies.

RECENT LEGISLATION

13 states proposed legislation relating to shift workers during the 2009 session. These bills concentrated on safe staffing practices and limits on mandatory overtime.

- Mandatory overtime (AK, HI, IL, MA, NC, NE, NY, OH, VT, WA, WI)
- Staffing requirements (IL, NY)
- Differential pay and compensation (IA, SC)

REFERENCES

Sources used to create this brief include the following:


The prevalence of shift work is greatest among workers in service occupations, such as protective service (50.6%)—which includes police, firefighters, and security guards—food preparation and serving occupations (40.4%), and production, transportation, and material moving occupations (26.2%) (U.S. Department of Labor, 2005).

Slightly more than one-half of full-time dual-earner couples have at least one partner who works nonstandard hours. This percentage increases to 54.4% among couples with children age 5 to 13 (Barnett, 2007).

More flexibility in employee scheduling is associated with lower turnover and absenteeism rates. In addition, turnover is lower when overtime is voluntary and highest when it is mandated (Aguirre, 2008).

DID YOU KNOW?

- The Policy Mini-Brief Series provides a summary of Shift Work policy information.
- To learn more about Shift Work, go to http://wfnetwork.bc.edu/pdfs/policy_makers6.pdf

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