

## FATIGUE – AREC SAFETY PLAN + ADVICE

### ACTIONS REQUIRED BY AREC MEMBERS

#### Identify fatigue – refer to the checklist next page

We don't go from 100% alert to 100% fatigued in one leap. At any time, those in a SAROP or SAREX will be at varying stages of fatigue. **People suffering from fatigue may display a number of signs that you will be able to recognise from the list on the following page.**

If you spot any of these signs, go and talk to them and do not task them in a role where they are going to be a risk to themselves or others. If they belong to another organisation alert their team leader to your observations.

A fatigued person needs to sleep – so ensure they get home safely. Remember that a fatigued person may not feel tired, so do not rely on their own assessment of tiredness.

#### Sleep is the only way to recover from fatigue.

IMT and AREC team leaders need to provide AREC members and other responders with regular breaks and rest opportunities during a SAROP or SAREX to reduce the potential, or effects, of fatigue.

If during a SAROP or SAREX a responder is showing signs of fatigue:

- Provide safe transportation home for them to get sleep; or
- Provide an appropriate (cool, dark, quiet) area for them to sleep.

#### Fatigue – a threat to safe AREC operations

Humans go through a daily cycle of being awake during the day and then sleeping at night. Sleep helps the body recover physically, as tissues repair and energy stores are restocked; and recover mentally, as the brain processes the day's activities discarding irrelevant or minor short-term memories and reordering the rest into meaningful long-term memories.

We get tired from physical activity, especially activities that exceed normal day-to-day routines. We can also get mentally tired if the situations we find ourselves in cause stress. For example, worrying about a problem that we cannot solve, concern about others, over-thinking a problem, etc.

We may also have an underlying health condition such as chronic pain, sleep disruption due to sleep apnea, chronic low-level inflammation, or other conditions that leads to sleep deprivation.

A good sleep usually resolves matters. Have you ever gone to bed worried about a problem then woken up the next day and magically the answer is in your head already, or the worry seems to have resolved? Your brain was hard at work whilst you were sleeping and fixed your problem for you. Amazing isn't it that we seem to have an unconscious ability to keep on problem solving.

On the other hand, if we disrupt our natural body cycles of day/night and lose our rest and recovery cycle we build up a processing debt that accumulates over time. We can then start to feel lethargic and even more tired than we otherwise would. This can then interfere with our processes of daily living. For example, if we are driving, we may doze off and crash the car, or on a SAR activity we may mishear a message and incorrectly record what we heard.

Sometimes our underlying issues start to overwhelm our ability to cope in the short term as we aren't allowing ourselves time to recover and get back to normal. The end result is what we call chronic fatigue. If you start to suffer from that then you need to seek medical advice.

Fatigue is therefore a normal state that people experience. It is a symptom of stress and associated with impaired performance either physical and/or mental. It can have the same negative effects on critical decision making as being chemically impaired (under the influence of drugs or alcohol).

## FATIGUE CHECKLIST

Refer to the AREC Deployment Plan and associated policies for additional guidance.

Use this checklist to identify signs of fatigue in yourself and others

| PHYSICAL SIGNS   | MENTAL SIGNS  |
|--|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Eye rubbing                        | <input type="radio"/> Slowed reaction time                  |
| <input type="radio"/> Yawning                            | <input type="radio"/> Slow response questions/conversations |
| <input type="radio"/> Slumped posture                    | <input type="radio"/> Reduced situational awareness         |
| <input type="radio"/> Slow blinks                        | <input type="radio"/> Poor memory                           |
| <input type="radio"/> Desire to sleep                    | <input type="radio"/> Distracted                            |
| <input type="radio"/> Reduced coordination & motor skill | <input type="radio"/> Failure to anticipate                 |
| <input type="radio"/> Micro-sleeps or spacing out        | <input type="radio"/> Omissions/carelessness                |
| <input type="radio"/> Slow reaction time                 | <input type="radio"/> Poor decision making or judgement     |
| <input type="radio"/> Nausea/vomiting/headache/dizziness | <input type="radio"/> Decrease in problem solving           |
| <input type="radio"/> Not using PPE properly or at all   | <input type="radio"/> Greater tolerance for error           |
|  | <input type="radio"/> Reduced visual perception             |

  

| EMOTIONAL/AFFECTIVE SIGNS   |
|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Irritable or easily frustrated                        |
| <input type="radio"/> Tense communication                                   |
| <input type="radio"/> Withdrawn, untalkative                                |
| <input type="radio"/> Hyper reactivity                                      |
| <input type="radio"/> Delayed response on 2-way radio                       |
| <input type="radio"/> Disregard for command orders and tasking instructions |
| <input type="radio"/> More quietly behaved than normal                      |
| <input type="radio"/> Poor motivation or attitude                           |
| <input type="radio"/> Unstable mood and/or strained relationships           |

### Use of checklist

This checklist is not intended to be filled in by each participant. It is merely a guide to get you thinking about what fatigue looks like in others.

As we get older, we still think we are 18 and bullet proof when actually we can't cope very well with prolonged, tiring activities.

Some of the signs you may see in others will be able to recognise as symptoms within you. When you start to get tired and fatigued just pay attention to what your body is telling you and ease off, have a break, then recharge your biological batteries and your sleep reserves.

## SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

### Fatigue as a Hazard in an AREC context

Fatigue is a hazard that can contribute to two risks during a SAROP or SAREX or other AREC activity.

**Firstly**, fatigue may lead to a health and safety incident causing harm to a responder. People who are fatigued are not as alert as they normally are. They are less able to make good judgements and decisions; and are slower to respond and adapt to changing circumstances.

In a SAROP or SAREX, which are often conducted in high-risk situations and environments, this can mean they put themselves and others at risk by making mistakes.

**Secondly**, fatigue may lessen the effectiveness of a SAR or AREC activity. A fatigued person can, in particular roles and situations, hinder the activity and compromise the chances of a successful outcome.

It can be difficult during a SAR or AREC activity for responders to pause, recognise and take care of their own needs and their own health. The drive and motivation to push through and press on can become all consuming.

It is therefore imperative that AREC and the other organisations directing and controlling responders consider the health and fitness of those they are responsible for. We must do this in order for members/staff to be confident they are able to participate fully in the activity without posing a danger to themselves, other responders, or any person(s) in distress.

### Chronic fatigue

As well as the immediate problems listed above, fatigue can lead to long-term health problems. Looking after all the AREC members and those around us is not just a legal requirement, it is essential to ensuring a healthy, sustainable, and efficient search and rescue sector that is able to respond to people in distress.

If anyone is starting to suffer from chronic fatigue, they need to seek medical help and/or be encouraged to seek help

## FURTHER INFORMATION & RESOURCES

This AREC Safety Plan + Advice is only a brief summary of the condition, provides a minimum compliance regime, a basic decision-making tool, and some additional background information.

This document is not a definitive explanation of fatigue or necessarily sufficient to be applicable in all situations.

Further resources can be found via the following references:

**NZSAR fatigue brochure printable pdf:** <https://www.nzsar.govt.nz/assets/Downloadable-Files/NZSAR-Fatigue-Brochure-Final-13.08.21.pdf>

**NZSAR fatigue guidance notes used in the preparation of this Safety Standard:**  
<https://www.nzsar.govt.nz/assets/Downloadable-Files/SAR-Guidance-Note-Managing-Fatigue-Mar-2020.pdf>

**Wikipedia:** <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fatigue>