



Department of Local Government,
Industry Regulation and Safety



Managing driver fatigue

Study guide for administrators

April 2026



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Reference

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Introduction

This Guide has been written to assist persons conducting a business or undertaking (PCBUs) to fulfill their 'duties' under the *Work Health and Safety Act 2020* (WHS Act) and the *Work Health and Safety (General) Regulations 2022* (WHS Regulations) when managing driver fatigue.

A duty is a legal requirement which must be fulfilled. Key duties include:

- PCBU
 - ensure the health and safety of workers and others in the workplace. This is done through measures such as the provision and maintenance of a work environment without risks to health and safety and having safe systems of work
- Officers
 - ensure that the PCBU complies with their duties and obligations
- Workers and others (such as visitors)
 - take reasonable care for the worker's own health and safety and that of other persons in the workplace
 - comply with any reasonable instruction that is given by the PCBU to allow them to comply with this WHS Act
 - cooperate with any reasonable policy or procedure of the PCBU that has been notified to them.

Information on work health and safety (WHS) duties of those in the workplace can be found in the [How to manage work health and safety risks: Code of practice](#).

Important work health and safety terms

The WHS Act recognises that not all risks can be addressed in the same way. The WHS Act requires duty holders to manage WHS in each situation 'as far is reasonably practicable'. This includes considering weighing up factors such as:

- the likelihood of the hazard or the risk concerned occurring
- the degree of harm that might result from the hazard or the risk
- what the person concerned knows, or ought reasonably to know, about the hazard or the risk and ways of eliminating or minimising it
- after assessing the extent of the risk and the available ways of eliminating or minimising the risk, the cost associated with available ways of this, including whether the cost is grossly disproportionate to the risk.

More information can be found in WorkSafe's [How to determine what is reasonably practicable to meet a health and safety duty: Interpretive guideline](#).

The words 'must', 'requires' or 'mandatory' indicate a legal requirement exists that must be complied with. The word 'should' is used to indicate a recommended course of action, while 'may' is used to indicate an optional course of action.

Additional information can be found in WorkSafe's [Overview of the WHS Act](#), and [Overview of the WHS \(General\) Regulations](#).

Other legal requirements

Under Western Australian law, the following categories of drivers are required to have a 0.00% blood alcohol concentration (BAC):

- vehicles exceeding 22.5 tonne gross combination mass (GCM)
- vehicles carrying dangerous goods (when such goods are being carried)
- buses (while carrying passengers where the vehicle is equipped to carry more than 12 adults including the driver)
- small charter vehicles (when carrying passengers for hire or reward)
- taxis (when carrying passengers for hire or reward).

As can be seen, these laws cover some categories of commercial drivers which may result in driver fatigue.

Heavy Vehicle National Law (HVNL) commenced on 10 February 2014 in the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania and Victoria.

The HVNL applies to Western Australian heavy vehicle drivers when they cross into one of the states or territories where the HVNL applies. The driving and rest periods under the WA WHS Regulations are different to those under the HVNL. Drivers operating within WA must follow the WA laws.

Under Department of Transport rules, you must carry and complete a National Driver Work Diary (NDWD) if you drive:

- a vehicle or vehicle combination weighing more than 12 tonnes or a bus fitted to carry more than 12 adults including the driver; and
- outside of Western Australia and the Northern Territory.

You must record your work and rest details of all trips more than 100 kilometres from your driver base.

Administrators

Driver fatigue management plan

A Driver Fatigue Management Plan (DFMP) is a written document outlining the company's approach to managing fatigue and the procedures that must be followed. It must cover these areas:

- scheduling trips
- rostering drivers
- establishing drivers' fitness for work
- educating drivers about fatigue management
- managing incidents related to commercial vehicles
- establishing and maintaining appropriate workplace conditions.

Every company that operates commercial vehicles must have a DFMP in place and it should be part of the risk management systems. Every company has some risk management systems in place, even if they are not written down. For example, preventative truck maintenance is a risk management system, as are commercial vehicle driver rosters

DFMP - Documentation

The DFMP must be documented. Documenting policies and procedures associated with the DFMP serves as practical evidence that a system is in place and allows for the measurement of the system's effectiveness.

The WHS Regulations require PCBUs to provide their workers with a safe system of work, and the written DFMP serves as evidence of this. WorkSafe inspectors may request to see the DFMP during workplace visits or investigation into a serious accidents or incidents.

Documentation should be well managed, including systems that are numbered and dated to facilitate updates.

Record keeping

Record keeping is crucial as it verifies that the DFMP is operational and that operating standards are met. Records form a key part of the risk management process, providing a historical account of commercial vehicle drivers or management activity.

This information can be crucial in legal proceedings. Records must be kept for a minimum of three years

Factors to be considered in a DFMP

Work time and scheduling

- Time doing work that is incidental to the driving, such as servicing and maintaining the vehicle or operating mobile plant is counted as work time and should be considered when planning trips.
- Allow drivers flexibility to manage unforeseen circumstances that may require schedule changes.
- Maximise opportunities for sleep and to trip preparation by avoiding very early departures.
- When drivers return from leave, allow time for them to readjust to working long hours and night shifts.
- Prioritise schedules and rosters that depart from daytime operations.
- Arrange rostered hours to be as regular and predictable as possible

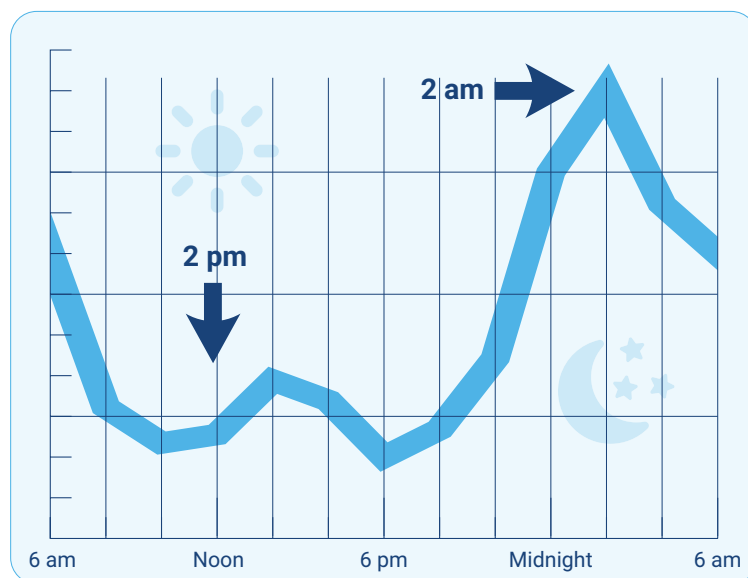


Figure 1: Commercial driver crash rate by time of day

Fitness for duty

- Require drivers to present and remain fit for duty, including being free from the effects of alcohol or drugs.
- Develop a written policy on fitness for duty in consultation with workers and unions.
- Provide an adequate sleeping berth where drivers are expected to sleep during periods of non-work time in the vehicle.

Health and wellbeing

- Require regular health assessment by a suitably qualified medical practitioner (to the National Road Transport Commission or Federal office of Road Safety standard).
- Ensure medical assessments consider sleep disorders and other fatigue related conditions.
- Identify health issues that may impact safe work, e.g. diabetes, heart disease, sleep apnoea.
- Provide employee assistance programs, when necessary and practicable.
- Offer drivers information and support to help them manage their health.
- Provide the working environment that meets appropriate Australian standards for seating and sleeping accommodation

Scheduling

A key factor in managing commercial vehicle driver fatigue is effective trip scheduling. Schedules should be practicable and reasonable, incorporating pre-trip planning to minimise fatigue. Commercial vehicle drivers should not be required to drive unreasonable distances without adequate rest. Scheduling practices should prioritise the safety and health of the driver over the delivery of a load. If your scheduling practices are inadequate, the rest of your system becomes meaningless.

1. The primary risk factor for fatigue-related crashes is inadequate sleep for one or more nights. Company procedures should acknowledge that at least 6 hours of sleep are required each night to minimise fatigue. To ensure drivers have the opportunity for at least 6 hours of actual sleep, a minimum of 7 continuous hours off must be planned. This is the absolute minimum and may still lead to increased levels of fatigue over several days. Schedules should be developed to provide these or greater opportunities for sleep.
2. The second main risk factor for fatigue-related crashes is working at night. People who work at night often struggle to adjust their body clocks.

Regardless of how much sleep a person gets beforehand, they will still feel sleepy between 1 AM and 6 AM. Company procedures should acknowledge that driving during this period puts workers and other road users at risk. Written procedures should demonstrate that schedules are developed with this risk in mind, and that, where possible, there are opportunities to sleep during this period.

Rostering

Rosters are the commercial vehicle drivers planned pattern of work and rest for a week or more. Both rosters and workloads should be arranged to maximize drivers' recovery from the effects and onset of fatigue. Rostering practices must as far as practicable, be complied with the Work Health and Safety regulations.

Night shifts and irregular or rotating shift patterns are known risk factors for fatigue-related crashes. Company procedures must document how these risks are addressed, detailing measures to minimise night work. If night work cannot be eliminated, the documentation should explain how the company manages fatigue related to night work.

Key factors in scheduling and rostering

To comply with the operating standards, scheduling and rostering must ensure that:

- Drivers are given a 24-hour notice to prepare for a trip of 14 hours or more.
- A solo commercial vehicle driver has the opportunity for at least 7 continuous hours of rest in any 24-hour period, preferably between 10 PM and 8 AM.
- When commercial vehicle drivers work a continuous rotating shift system of 5 days or more, there must be 24 hours of non-working time between shift changes.
- A commercial vehicle driver is not permitted to exceed 168 hours of working time in any 14-day period.
- Total non-working time in any 72-hour period is at least 27 hours.
- Continuous periods of work time do not exceed 5 hours before a break of at least 10 minutes is taken.
- A schedule must allow for an average of 20 minutes breaks from driving for each 5 hours of work time, and a minimum break from driving of at least 10 consecutive minutes at the end of 5 hours work time.
- A commercial vehicle driver has at least two continuous period of 24 hours of non-work time in 14 days.
- Ensure 24 continuous hours of non-work time between shift changes when commercial vehicle drivers work a continuous rotating shift system of 5 days or more.

An example of a 4 day trip in Western Australia is shown at Appendix 1 (page 9).

Operating standard for solo driving	
Minimum continuous non work time in any 24 hours	7 hours
Minimum non work time in any 72-hour period	27 hours
Maximum time between major rest breaks (7 hours or longer)	17 hours
Minimum 24-hour continuous periods of time not working in any 14 days	2 periods
Minimum 24 hours continuous periods of time not working in any 28 days	4 periods
Operating standard for two-up driving	
Minimum non work time in a 24-hour period	7 hours
Minimum continuous non work time in any 48 hours (must be in a stationary vehicle or away from the vehicle)	7 hours
OR	
Minimum continuous non work time in any 7-day period (must be in a stationary vehicle or away from the vehicle)	48 hours
All commercial vehicle drivers	
Maximum continuous work time (driving and non-driving work time)	5 hours
Minimum break from driving for each 5 hours of work	20 minutes
Minimum break from driving to be taken after 5 hours of work	10 minutes
Maximum work time in any 14 days (unless working to 28 day roster, then it is reduced to 144 hours)	168 hours

Table 1: Trip planning work and non-work hours.

Developing DFMP - Control measures

To ensure compliance with the operating standards, the following practices should be adopted when a commercial vehicle driver is likely to work more than 14 hours in consecutive 24-hour periods:

- Replace commercial vehicle driver with a fresh relief driver where practicable.
- Reduce the period of work time in the next 24-hour period to ensure that at least 27 hours of non-work time is available in any 72-hour period to recover from the effects of any accumulated sleep debt.
- Set schedules so commercial vehicle drivers can rest when and where most appropriate.
- Use shared driving, driving with a relief driver (two-up driving).
- Split trip into shorter continuous driving periods.
- Schedule rest to be before or coincide with high fatigue risk times, e.g. night and dawn.
- Change customer pick-up or delivery times where possible
- Allow for a day of non-work time after a trip.
- Remove or modify tasks incidental to the driving, such as loading or unloading, refuelling etc. that are not necessary for the commercial vehicle driver to perform.
- Ensure a commercial vehicle driver's roster is as regular as practicable.
- Employ a commercial vehicle driver on light non-driving duties at the depot to allow sleep at home.
- Ensure a solo commercial vehicle driver has the opportunity for at least 7 continuous hours of rest in each 24-hour period, preferably between 10 PM and 8 AM.
- Ensure the commercial vehicle driver has access to medical or other appropriate assistance.
- Develop policies covering fitness for duty in consultation with workers and unions.
- Train commercial vehicle drivers in the risk factors that may affect fitness for duty and provide relevant control measures.

Appendix 1: Example 4 day journey in Western Australia

Day 1	Start time	End time	Kms	Work time	Breaks	Non-work
Commences work in the Kewdale depot, carries out pre-start checks	16:30	17:00	–	30m	–	–
Departs Kewdale depot to Bindoon	17:00	18:20	78km	1hr20m	–	–
Tyre check at Bindoon stop	18:20	18:30	–	–	10m	–
Proceeds from Bindoon to Wubin	18:30	20:30	188km	2hr	–	–
Meal break	20:30	21:00	–	–	–	30m
Departs Wubin and arrives at Mt Magnet	21:00	24:00	299km	3hr	–	–
Tyre check (break from driving)	0:00	0:10	–	–	10m	–
Proceeds from Mt Magnet to Cue	0:10	1:00	80km	50m	–	–
Takes a seven-hour long break (night's sleep)	1:00	8:00	–	–	–	7hr
Day 2	Start time	End time	Kms	Work time	Breaks	Non-work
Departs Cue and drives to Meekatharra	8:00	9:10	115km	1hr10m	–	–
Tyre check (break from driving)	9:10	9:20	–	–	10m	–
Proceeds from Meekatharra to Kumarina	9:20	11:20	193km	2hr	–	–
Tyre check (break from driving)	11:20	11:30	–	–	10m	–
Proceeds to Kumarina to Newman	11:30	14:00	250km	2hr30m	–	–
Takes meal break at Newman	14:00	14:30	–	–	–	30m
Unloading	14:30	15:30	–	1hr	–	–
Departs Newman and drives through to Auski Roadhouse	15:30	17:30	192km	192km	–	–
Tyre check (break from driving)	17:30	17:50	–	–	20m	–
Departs Auski and drives to Port Hedland truck stop	17:50	20:30	257km	2hr40m	–	–
Spends 30 minutes at truck stop (meal break)	20:30	21:00	–	–	–	30m
Departs truck stop and drives to depot in Port Hedland	21:00	21:30	–	30m	–	–
Unloading at Port Hedland	21:30	23:00	–	1hr30m	–	–
Takes a seven-hour long break (night's sleep)	23:00	6:00	–	–	–	7hr
Day 3	Start time	End time	Kms	Work time	Breaks	Non-work
Departs Port Hedland to Auski	6:00	9:00	266km	3hr	–	–
Takes a meal break at Auski	9:00	9:30	–	–	–	30m
Departs Auski to Newman	9:30	11:30	192km	2hr	–	–
Loading in Newman Depot	11:30	12:00	–	30m	–	–
Drives from Newman Depot to Capricorn Roadhouse	12:00	12:30	15km	30m	–	–
Takes a meal break at Capricorn	12:30	13:00	–	–	–	30m
Departs Capricorn and drives to Meekatharra	13:30	17:00	420km	4hr	–	–
Take a meal break at Meekatharra	17:00	17:30	–	–	–	30m
Departs Meekatharra and drives to Mt Magnet	17:30	19:30	195km	2hr	–	–
Tyre check (break from driving)	19:30	19:40	–	–	10m	–
Departs Mt Magnet and drives to Wubin	19:40	22:40	297km	3hr	–	–
Take a long break (night's sleep)	22:40	6:00	–	–	–	7hr20m
Day 4	Start time	End time	Kms	Work time	Breaks	Non-work
Departs Wubin and drives to Kewdale	6:00	9:30	266km	3hr30m	–	–
Refuelling and completing paperwork	9:30	10:00	–	30m	–	–
Ceases work at 10:00 hours						
TOTAL				40hr	1hr10m	24hr20m



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