

An emergency order comes in from your best customer, and you have no choice but to ask your employees to work a few extra hours. Make sure they're rested and alert, or they may be an accident just waiting to happen.


Do you consider overtime to be a safety issue? Actually, it is a safety concern, and one that is usually overlooked. We tend to look at overtime work as a necessary evil that adds to costs. Not only does overtime increase the cost of doing business, it can also create a much higher incident of accidents in the workplace. Our employees are only human, and they get tired and sometimes make mistakes. The opportunity for these errors occurs with a much greater frequency as the amount of working hours increase. Of course, many of these errors only affect production, but the chance of accidents occurring also increases. I know that in many smaller shops the owners work side by side with the employees on the shop floor. Naturally, as an owner, we tend to regard our hours as not limited by the normal workweek. The danger in this is that we ask our employees to work too much overtime. Sometimes overtime is required when we're behind on a job, but we must keep in mind that our employees will be more tired, and therefore more careless as a result. This can—and does—lead to situations that place these employees in danger. Don't forget that you, as owners, should have the same concern about yourselves. In light of this, it stands to reason that proper scheduling of work in our shops is not only a production issue, but a safety issue as well. I can't remember ever seeing an article or brochure that

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attributes production scheduling as a safety concern. We should try to do everything possible to protect our employees from situations that put them in a position to injure themselves or others, and this includes overtime. Think about it: Not only do we sometimes ask our employees to work additional hours, which makes them more vulnerable in the workplace, but then they're also tired driving home—which makes them dangerous on the road—and while they're doing all the other things we do on our own time. So let's all keep in mind that asking our employees to work extra hours

can result in problems both in the workplace and beyond.

Something else that isn't normally considered to be a safety issue is letting employees work in the shop by themselves, and I think we're all guilty of this. An employee that is asked to work on or around machinery without supervision, or with at least a fellow employee within sight, is automatically in greater danger. If there is a hazardous situation that can affect this employee and no one is there to bring it to his attention, then the probability of the employee being injured is much greater. And if that employee is injured and unable to move, and there's no one within easy hailing distance, things can go downhill very quickly. We all want to protect our employees from such situations, but at the same time feel that we can't afford to have two people around when one can actually do the job. But it's important to consider the potential costs if that one person working alone is injured—in other words, we should not be pennywise and pound foolish.

What I want to convey by sharing these thoughts is that safety should be factored into every decision we make. It's an issue no matter what area of our business we're concerned with, and it should be at the forefront of our thoughts at all times. I hope that we all keep safety concerns as a prime objective in our enterprise, and at all times when we're considering our relationship with—and responsibility to—our employees. 

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