



Employee Newsletter

February 2021

President's Day Feb 15th



FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS

George Feinauer	1
Rhonda Taylor	2
Joe Wood	2
Gary Gladson	3
Travis Jackson	3
Robin Kline	3
Richard Chant	4
Johnny Odom	4
Gary Tompa	5
Mitch Morgan	7
Nick Roberson	7
Debbie Ambler	9
Beth Rutledge	9
Kevin Carter	11
Janet Crisp	11
Matt White	11
Karen Freyre	12
Parker Morgan	12
Michael Smith	13
Caroline Huskins	15
Melody Johnson	15
Jamie Pack	15
Hagan Newton	16
Dennis Dore	17
Kathy Pratt	18
Danny Clayton	21
Jeremy Lance	21
Tonya Chastain	22
Jessica Mariano	22
Regina Swanson	23
Jennifer O'Dell	24
Nolan Queen	24
Kent Drum	26
Brandon Morgan	27
Carolyn Hogsed	28
Heath Nagel	28
Junior Peels	28
Lisa Wells	28

Ages 22 to 79

If you would like something published in the newsletter, or have ideas to suggest, contact Melody Johnson @ melody.johnson@cherokeecounty-nc.gov

Commission Meetings

February 1st 6:30 pm
February 15th 6:30 pm

LEAVE BALANCES

Your leave balances should look normal on your direct deposit you receive on February 5th. Any excess vacation pay you had at the end of 2020 was rolled into your sick balance. For general folks, that was anything in excess of 240 hours, for EMS, deputies, detention officers and dispatchers, anything in excess of 252 hours rolled over. This is a good thing, though, because unused sick leave actually counts as time worked when you get ready to retire. This amount is made a part of the calculation of your benefit. We have had folks who were able to retire with 30 years of service at 28 years due to having accrued so much sick leave...so think about that before you "burn" your sick time. It does count for something down the road. You may say, I'll never make it to 30 years, but you just never know. You just might.

CHANGES TO FLEXIBLE SPENDING ACCOUNTS

The COVID relief package signed into law by President Trump in December made changes to flexible spending accounts for plan years ending in 2020 and 2021. The most consequential of these for most of us is that we are now allowed to carry over an unlimited amount into the new plan year—just for this one year, where the carryover limit had been \$500. The bill also allows employees to make changes to their flexible spending contributions mid-year without a qualifying event. Any new monies set aside would only apply to expenses incurred AFTER the change in election, so you would not be able to retroactively use any funds that are set aside. Still, if you didn't elect as much as you now know you will need and you have expenses coming up, you may make changes to your election. Contact me if you are interested in making changes to your flexible spending account. Also, if you have been a full-time employee for a year and wish to enroll now, you may do that as well.

WORKERS COMP

As we start the new year, I want to remind everyone again about the procedure for reporting and seeking treatment for a work related accident or injury. Work related injuries resulting from an accident need to be reported within 24 hours—**EVEN IF YOU DON'T INITIALLY GO FOR TREATMENT.** The reporting form is on the Human Resources page on the County website under tax forms and other forms. That way if you are not better in a few days, there is no question about how and where you got hurt. Treatment starts at the Murphy location of Urgent Care on Ledford Street. **YOU MAY NOT GO TO YOUR PRIMARY CARE PHYSICIAN FOR A WORK RELATED INJURY.** Under NC law, the employer directs your care and we use Sedgwick as our administrator for workers comp claims.

TOO MUCH CHOLESTEROL IN YOUR BLOOD INCREASES YOUR RISK.
GET TESTED TO LEARN YOUR TOTAL CHOLESTEROL, GOOD (HDL) AND BAD (LDL) CHOLESTEROL, AND TRIGLUCERIDES.

PHYSICAL INACTIVITY BOOSTS YOUR RISK. EVEN IF YOU HAVE NO OTHER RISK FACTORS.
AIM FOR 2 1/2 HOURS OF MODERATE-INTENSITY AEROBIC ACTIVITY PER WEEK.

SMOKERS ARE UP TO 6 TIMES MORE LIKELY TO SUFFER HEART ATTACKS. DON'T SMOKE AND, IF YOU DO, QUIT.

HEARTTRUTH.GOV
ARE YOU AT RISK FOR HEART DISEASE?
THE heart TRUTHSM
A program of the National Institutes of Health

THE HIGHER YOUR BODY MASS INDEX (BMI), THE HIGHER YOUR RISK FOR HEART DISEASE, ESPECIALLY IN MEN.
MAINTAIN A HEALTHY WEIGHT.

HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE GREATLY INCREASES YOUR RISK.
GET TESTED. REDUCE YOUR SODIUM INTAKE. STAY ACTIVE. MAINTAIN A HEALTHY WEIGHT.

DIABETES PUTS YOU AT INCREASED RISK FOR HEART DISEASE.
YOU CAN LOWER YOUR RISK BY KEEPING YOUR BLOOD GLUCOSE CLOSE TO THE RECOMMENDED TARGET RANGE.

Sources: ¹National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. (2005). Your guide to a healthy heart. ²Diabetes Prevention Program Research Group (2002). Reduction in the incidence of type 2 diabetes with lifestyle intervention or metformin. *New England Journal of Medicine*. 346(6), 393-403.

TIME SHEETS

I continue to see time sheets completed for employees by supervisors and it seems to be the same few employees over and over. Working here carries with it the responsibility of completing your own time sheet and turning it in every other week. If you have trouble remembering, set a reminder on your phone or partner with a co-worker to help you remember to do your own time sheet. If this doesn't apply to you, skip over this and go to the next topic, but if it does apply to you, please make a commitment to be responsible this year and do your own time sheet. Thank you so much.

Why didn't the skeleton play football? His heart wasn't in it.

The worst time to have a heart attack is during a game of charades.

FATIGUE ON THE JOB



Safety pros know the impact fatigued employees create in the workplace. Here's a reminder of how big that impact can be.

Safety training provider, the American Safety Council, has compiled a list of [10 Dangers for Tired Workers](#), based on research and investigations regarding employee fatigue:

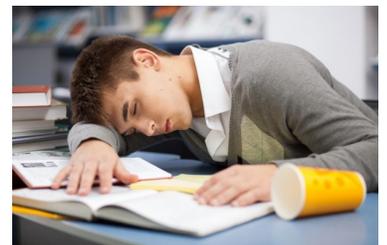
Improper safety enforcement and major injury. Major industrial incidents have been linked to sleep deprivation, including the Chernobyl and Three Mile Island nuclear disasters. An investigation showed that some workers at a [BP refinery in Texas](#) where an explosion led to the death of 15 workers had worked 12 hours a day for nearly 30 days in a row.

1. **Impaired motor skills.** The *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine* found 17 to 19 hours without sleep has the same effect as a 0.05% blood alcohol level. Employee response times can be cut in half, much like when someone is intoxicated.
2. **Poor decision-making and risk taking.** Studies show losing sleep can lead to riskier behavior. Employees may make impulsive decisions without realizing it.
3. **Poor memory and information processing.** Being tired can make it difficult to focus and retain new information. Slow cognitive function can be particularly problematic in jobs that require strong problem-solving skills.
4. **Falling asleep on the job.** This is the worst case scenario. Employees won't be able to respond to a hazard. This was the case in the Exxon Valdez oil spill in 1989.
5. **Special risk for shift workers.** Fatigued workers are most susceptible to accidents between midnight and 8 a.m. Long and rotating shifts pose a greater health concern than a traditional, eight-hour shift.
6. **Inability to deal with stress.** Getting less than seven to eight hours of sleep per night can have lasting effects on mood and stress levels. Personal issues have been cited as a primary or secondary cause for industrial accidents.
7. **Sleep deprivation reduces productivity.** The U.S. loses \$136.4 in productivity each year due to sleep deprivation. As work hours increase, output decreases.
8. **Sleep deprivation impacts workers in the long-term.** Chronic sleep deprivation can lead to obesity, worsening of diabetes, heart disease, digestion problems, depression, some cancers, reproductive problems and sleep disorders. Fatigue also reduces immunity against viruses, increasing the likelihood that a cold or flu will spread.

Overlooking signs of fatigued workers. There are no specific safety regulations for extended work shifts in general industry, although there are some in industries such as [transportation](#). The [American Safety Council](#) says the lack of regulations can lead to lack of discussion with employees about the issues involving fatigue.

While you may not be able to tuck your employees in to bed, you can provide training about the hazards of fatigue and offer them helpful sleep tips:

- Go to sleep at the same time every night.
- Avoid caffeine, alcohol and nicotine several hours before sleep.
- Limit naps to make sure you are tired at bedtime.
- Wind down before bed. Stop using electronic devices at least an hour before going to sleep.
- Sleep on a comfortable mattress, in a dark, cool room.



By Fred Hosier, June 1, 2018