# Dream Team: Keep Sleep a Priority at Your Nonprofit


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**Resource Type:** Risk eNews

**Topic:** HR Risk and Employment Practices

“It is a common experience that a problem difficult at night is resolved in the morning after the committee of sleep has worked on it.” — John Steinbeck

The National Sleep Foundation declares the first week of March Sleep Awareness Week. It’s no coincidence that their annual event co-occurs with the start of Daylight-Saving Time, springing forward causes the loss of 40 minutes of sleep for Americans nationwide. *Business Insider* reports that hospitals see an uptick of 24% in heart-attack visits on the Monday following the time change. It’s no secret that sleep (or the lack of it) has a profound effect on the human body. Sleep is essential to maintaining good health, sustaining cognitive function, and more.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reports that the prevalence of sleep disorders in this country has caused the lack of sleep to be raised officially to “public health epidemic” status. Moreover, this isn’t the first time NRMC has brought up the risks of sleeplessness! Why is this important to the success of your risk management function and risk-taking that fortifies your nonprofit’s mission? Lack of sleep can cause:

- impulsive behavior; risk-taking is absolutely necessary to advance a charitable mission, but impulsive moves are rarely risk-aware,
- decreased reaction time which results in a higher likelihood of accidents,
- mood changes; when emotions run high on low energy, simple differences of opinion can turn into unproductive tension among coworkers, and possibly clients,
- poor balance increases the chance for slips, trips, and falls,
- increased risk for health problems could mean higher health insurance costs and a greater possibility of more significant employee absences, and
- loss of focus and concentration often means decreased productivity and an uptick in “cyberloafing.”

These are just a few cause and effect statements that result from a sleep-deprived workforce. Now that we’ve sprung forward, what can you do to help your team members be more mindful of the risks they face when they are sleepy?

## Employee education is a top factor in improving sleep.

The American Academy of Sleep Medicine co-authored a study with the CDC and Sleep Research Society (SRS), which found that employer-sponsored awareness activities could improve sleep. Here are some simple topics you can pass down to your employees to help them develop and maintain good sleeping habits:

- Publish the average sleep needs by relative age group.
- Make employees aware of the available resources to help sleep through organization-sponsored health care programs.
- Encourage a set daily routine (even on the weekends) to maintain the body's natural circadian rhythm.
- Sponsor a workplace wellness program to foster healthy lifestyles and support positive sleep results.

## Reduce the risk of an unrested workforce with organizational strategies.

The pressure to work extended hours often results from cultural norms in the workplace. Changing these perceptions needs to come from the executive team. Your senior managers can start this shift by modeling work-life balance and making sure that performance rewards aren't limited to the staff who work the longest hours. Other steps that your organization can take include:

- Update lighting in workspaces to mimic natural light to promote healthy circadian rhythms.
- Educate employees about the effects of blue light on sleep patterns and offer blue light filters for company-provided devices.
- Limit work hours, especially for staff in safety-sensitive positions, and discourage managers from making it sound like overtime is required. The practice of limited work hours is common among organizations that have drivers, health care workers, and other high-stress positions.

Providing support and empathy to your team members are important elements in fostering a healthy workplace. Rested employees are happier, healthier, more productive, and more creative! Making sleep a top priority reduces risks for preventable issues arising like slips, trips, falls, and accidents. More importantly, it might just elevate the chance that your risk leaders are on their game to dream up the next big opportunity to fulfill your mission!

Resources to help you reduce the risk of restlessness:

- "Dream a Little Dream: Managing Sleep Deprivation Risks," Nonprofit Risk Management Center, *Risk eNews*
- "Risks of Sleep Deprivation: Get Your Beauty Sleep for Safety," Nonprofit Risk Management Center, *Risk eNews*
- "Sleep Needs Across the Lifespan," Sleep Health Foundation
- "Discover Ways to Adjust to the Time Change This Spring So You Can Snooze Comfortably," The Better Sleep Council
- "Daylight-saving time is literally killing us," *Business Insider*

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