

AVIATION MAINTENANCE TECHNICIAN CERTIFICATION SERIES

HUMAN FACTORS

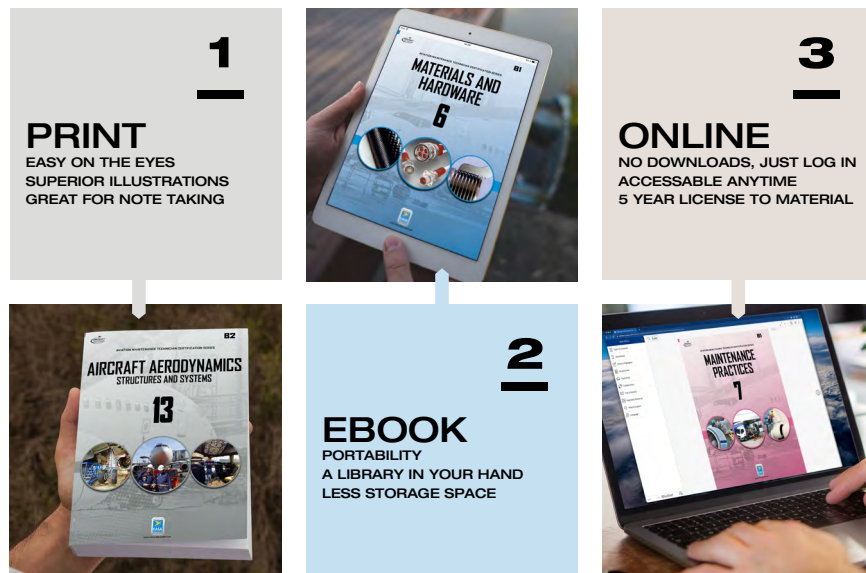
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VERSION	EFFECTIVE DATE
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002	2018.10	Typographic and layout updates – No content changes.
002.1	2023.04	Inclusion of Measurement Standards for clarification, page iv. Minor appearance and format updates.
003	2024.10	Regulatory update for EASA 2023-989 compliance.
003.1	2025.09	Addition of Job Hazard Analysis to Submodule 9. Redefined MEDA as Maintenance Event Decision Aid.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

HUMAN FACTORS

Revision Log	iii	Environmental Factors.....	2.3
Measurement Standards	iv	The Nature of the Object Being Viewed	2.3
Basic Knowledge Requirements	v	Color Vision.....	2.3
Part 66 Basic Knowledge Requirements	vi	Night Vision and Color Loss.....	2.4
Table of Contents.....	ix	Vision and Aging Eyes.....	2.4
		Aging Eyes Symptoms.....	2.5
		What Can Be Done?	2.5
9.1 GENERAL	1.1	Hearing	2.5
Introduction.....	1.1	Basic Function of the Ear	2.5
The Need To Take Human Factors Into Account.....	1.1	Outer Ear.....	2.6
Incidents Attributable To Human Factors And Errors.....	1.2	Middle Ear.....	2.6
Case Study: Aloha Airlines Flight 243	1.2	Inner Ear	2.6
Investigation.....	1.3	Performance and Limitations of the Ear.....	2.6
Safety Recommendations	1.3	Impact of Noise on Performance.....	2.6
FAA Recommendations	1.3	High and Low Tone Deafness.....	2.6
Aloha Airlines Recommendations.....	1.3	Hearing Protection	2.6
Related to "The Dirty Dozen"	1.4	Hearing Loss Studies.....	2.7
Case Study: British Airways BAC-111 Windscreen Blowout ..	1.4	Information Processing	2.8
Investigation	1.4	Information Processing Model	2.8
Safety Recommendations	1.4	Stage 1: Gathering Information	2.8
British Airways Recommendations.....	1.4	Stage 2: Perception or Assessment.....	2.8
Civil Aviation Authority Recommendations.....	1.5	Stage 3: Evaluation and Decision Making	2.8
Related to "The Dirty Dozen"	1.5	Stage 4: Action/Response	2.9
Case Study: Nose Wheel Jammed on Dash-8.....	1.5	Stage 5: Feedback.....	2.9
Investigation	1.5	Attention and Perception.....	2.9
Related to "The Dirty Dozen"	1.5	Attention	2.9
Case Study: Failure To Pressurize After An Outflow Valve Was		Perception	2.9
Left In Open Position	1.5	Examples of the Perceptual Process	2.10
Investigation	1.6	Illusions of Perception	2.10
Safety Recommendations	1.6	Memory	2.11
Related to "The Dirty Dozen"	1.6	Memory Processes	2.11
Case Study: Main Wheel Incorrectly Fitted.....	1.6	Short Term Memory	2.11
Investigation	1.7	Long Term Memory	2.12
Safety Recommendations	1.7	Claustrophobia and Physical Access	2.12
Related to "The Dirty Dozen"	1.7	Claustrophobia.....	2.12
Case Study: Torch (flashlight) Left In Nose Wheel Steering		Fear of Heights	2.12
Cable Run	1.7	Submodule 2 Practice Questions.....	2.15
Investigation and Recommendations	1.8	Submodule 2 Practice Answers.....	2.16
Related to "The Dirty Dozen"	1.8		
Murphy's Law	1.8	9.3 SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY.....	3.1
Submodule 1 Practice Questions.....	1.11	Introduction.....	3.1
Submodule 1 Practice Answers	1.12	Accountability And Responsibility: Individual And Group....	3.1
		Case Study: Taking it For Granted	3.1
		Key Lessons	3.2
		Key Points	3.2
		Group or Team Responsibility.....	3.2
		Intergroup Conflict	3.2
		Group Polarization/Groupthink.....	3.2
		Social Loafing	3.3
		Motivation and Demotivation.....	3.3
		Motivation	3.3
		Reward and Punishment: Effects on Behavior	3.3
		Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs	3.4
		Demotivation.....	3.4
		Peer Pressure	3.5
		Experiment To Illustrate Conformity.....	3.5
9.2 HUMAN PERFORMANCE AND LIMITATIONS	2.1		
Introduction.....	2.1		
Vision.....	2.1		
Basic Components of the Eye	2.1		
The Cornea.....	2.1		
The Iris and Pupil.....	2.2		
The Lens.....	2.2		
The Retina	2.2		
Factors Affecting Vision	2.2		
Blind Spot	2.2		
Refractive Errors	2.3		
Other visual problems include.....	2.3		
Foreign Substances.....	2.3		

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Culture Issues	3.5	Time Pressure and Deadlines	4.3
How Does The Organizational Culture Affect The Work Of An AMT?	3.6	Time Pressure and Self Imposed Pressure	4.3
The Influence Of Organizational Culture On Safety	3.6	How Can Inappropriate Actual Or Self Imposed Pressure Be Managed?.....	4.5
Role In Developing The Culture Of Safety.....	3.6	Workload; Overload and Underload	4.5
Recognizing A Good Safety Culture?.....	3.6	Factors Determining Workload.....	4.5
Teamwork	3.6	Work Overload	4.5
Characteristics of Teams	3.7	Causes Of High Workload	4.5
Conditions For Effective Teamwork.....	3.7	Case Study: Short Handed	4.6
Shared and Understood Goal	3.7	Work Underload.....	4.6
Effective Leadership and Followership	3.7	Sleep and Fatigue, Shift Work	4.6
A Shared Mental Model	3.7	Fatigue	4.6
Practice Clear And Effective Communication	3.7	The Effects of Fatigue	4.6
Clear Delegation & Role Definition	3.8	Consider These Two Imaginary Scenarios	4.7
Clear Operating Procedures	3.8	Scenario 1.....	4.7
Appropriate Allocation of Workload	3.8	Scenario 2.....	4.7
Appropriate Authority Gradient	3.8	Memory Failures	4.7
Conflict Resolution	3.9	Failures to Notice Defects or Problems.....	4.7
Key Points	3.9	Case Study.....	4.7
Management, Supervision and Leadership.....	3.9	Are We The Best Judges Of Our Level Of Fatigue?.....	4.7
The Management Role.....	3.9	The Impact Of Fatigue In The Workplace.....	4.8
The Supervisory Role.....	3.9	The Causes of Fatigue	4.8
Leadership	3.10	Sleep Debt	4.8
Characteristics of a Good Leader	3.10	Sleep Apnea	4.9
What is Leadership?	3.10	When to see a doctor?	4.9
Motivating the Team.....	3.10	Circadian Rhythms	4.9
Reinforcing Good Attitudes and Behavior.....	3.10	Do shift workers adapt to permanent night shifts?.....	4.9
Demonstrating by Example.....	3.10	Beware the WOCL	4.9
Maintaining the Group	3.10	Factors That Increase The Impact of Fatigue.....	4.10
Fulfilling a Management Role.....	3.10	Case Study.....	4.10
What Leadership Is Not!.....	3.10	Managing The Risks Of Fatigue.....	4.10
Leadership Under Stress	3.11	Sleep Inertia (aka 'Sleep Drunkenness')	4.10
Consider the Following Scenario.....	3.11	Responsibilities of the Employer.....	4.11
Submodule 3 Practice Questions.....	3.13	Responsibilities of the Employee.....	4.11
Submodule 3 Practice Answers	3.14	Strategies to Deal with Fatigue	4.11
		Caffeine	4.11
		Breaks.....	4.11
		Progressive Restrictions.....	4.11
		Key Points	4.11
		Shift Work.....	4.12
		Advantages of Shift Work.....	4.12
		Disadvantages of Shift Work.....	4.12
		Rolling Shift Patterns	4.12
		Conclusion	4.12
		Alcohol, Medications, and Drug Abuse	4.12
		Alcohol.....	4.12
		How long does it take to eliminate alcohol from the body? ..	4.12
		Alcohol and Safety.....	4.14
		Alcohol and Sleep	4.14
		Disturbance of Paradoxical (REM) Sleep/Slow Wave Sleep Cycle.....	4.14
		Daytime Repercussions Of Alcohol's Effects On Sleep ...	4.14
		Alcohol and Attention.....	4.14
		What Would You Do?.....	4.14
		Drugs.....	4.14
		How Are Drugs Classified	4.15
9.4 FACTORS THAT AFFECT PERFORMANCE	4.1		
Introduction	4.1		
Fitness and Health.....	4.1		
Pre-employment Physical	4.1		
Day To Day Fitness And Health.....	4.1		
Positive Measures.....	4.2		
Stress: Domestic and Work Related	4.2		
Characteristics of Stress.....	4.2		
Stress Is Cumulative	4.2		
Causes of Stress	4.2		
Stressors	4.2		
Symptoms of Stress	4.2		
Consequences For AMTs	4.2		
Domestic Stress	4.2		
Work Related Stress.....	4.3		
Managing Stress	4.3		
Stress Coping Strategies	4.3		
Achieving Relaxation.....	4.3		
How stressed are you?	4.3		
What Your Score Means	4.3		

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Legal Drugs	4.15	How to Build and Maintain Situational Awareness	5.10
Illegal Drugs	4.15	Challenges to Situational Awareness.	5.10
Drugs Affecting the Central Nervous System	4.15	How To Detect Loss Of Situational Awareness	5.10
Depressants	4.15	Conclusion	5.10
Stimulants	4.15	Submodule 5 Practice Questions	5.11
Hallucinogens	4.15	Submodule 5 Practice Answers	5.12
How Drugs Affect People	4.15		
Legal Drugs; Prescription and Over the Counter.	4.16	9.6 TASKS.....6.1	
Sleeping Tablets	4.16	Introduction	6.1
Antidepressants	4.16	Planning Of Tasks, Equipment, And Spares	6.1
Antibiotics	4.16	Lack Of Resources... Not A Problem!	6.1
Antihistamines.	4.16	What Would You Do?	6.2
'Pep' Pills: (containing caffeine, dexedrine, benzedrine)	4.16	Is This Your Preferred Decision?	6.2
High Blood Pressure Medication	4.16	Key Points	6.2
Antimalarial Drugs	4.16	Physical Work	6.3
Oral Contraceptive Tablets	4.16	Repetitive Tasks, Complacency.	6.3
Sudafed.	4.16	Visual Inspection	6.4
Key Points	4.17	Critical Maintenance Tasks And Error Capturing Methods	6.5
Lack of Manpower.	4.17	What is a critical maintenance task?	6.5
Submodule 4 Practice Questions	4.19	Error Capturing Methods	6.6
Submodule 4 Practice Answers	4.20	Technical Documentation: Access, Use And Quality.	6.6
		Submodule 6 Practice Questions	6.7
		Submodule 6 Practice Answers	6.8
9.5 PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT5.1			
Noise And Fumes	5.1	9.7 COMMUNICATION 7.1	
Noise	5.1	What Is Communication?	7.1
Protecting Your Hearing	5.1	Communication Channels.	7.1
Know Your Work Environment.	5.1	Speech	7.1
Select Appropriate Hearing Protection Devices	5.1	Documents.	7.1
Fumes, Chemicals, Toxic Metals And Solvents	5.2	Non Verbal Communication	7.2
Chemicals.	5.2	Physical Cues	7.2
Gasoline Engine Exhaust (Carbon Monoxide).	5.2	Communication Within and Between Teams.	7.2
Kerosene Based Fuels.	5.2	Work Logging and Recording.	7.3
Toxic Metals.	5.3	Scheduled Task Cards	7.3
Cadmium	5.3	Non Scheduled Tasks.	7.3
Beryllium	5.3	Shift Handover	7.4
Preventative Actions for Toxic Metal Exposure	5.3	Concepts	7.4
Paints and Primers.	5.3	Aids to Effective Communication At Shift Handover	7.4
Hydraulic Fluids	5.4	Barriers To Effective Communication At Shift Handover.	7.5
Solvents	5.4	Shift Handover Meetings	7.5
Skin Contact	5.4	Walkthroughs	7.5
Eyes and Respiratory System.	5.4	Task Handover	7.6
Preventative Actions For Solvent Exposure	5.4	Handing Over a Task Directly to Another Person	7.6
Illumination	5.5	Handing Over a Task for Somebody to Complete	7.6
Climate and Temperature	5.5	An Accident Related to a Shift Handover.	7.6
The Body's Response To Heat	5.6	Four Ways to Improve Shift Handover.	7.7
Heat Stress and Major Disorders.	5.6	Effective And Ineffective Handovers	7.7
Working in the Cold	5.7	Keeping Up-To-Date, Currency	7.7
The Body's Response To Cold	5.7	Dissemination of Information.	7.8
Know Your Temperatures	5.7	Submodule 7 Practice Questions	7.9
Preventing Cold Related Disorders.	5.8	Submodule 7 Practice Answers	7.10
Motion and Vibration	5.9		
Working Environment.	5.9	9.8 HUMAN ERROR.....8.1	
What Is A Safety Culture?	5.9	Introduction	8.1
Building a Safety Culture	5.9	Error Models and Theories	8.2
Situational Awareness	5.9	The PEAR Model	8.2
Shared Situational Awareness	5.10		

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PEAR Applied to Maintenance	8.3	Case Study	9.4
People	8.3	Reporting Hazards	9.4
Environment	8.3	Organizational Human Factors Program	9.5
Action	8.3	Professionalism and Integrity	9.5
Resources	8.4	Seven Key Principles Of Ethical Behavior	9.5
HFACS-ME Model	8.4	Error Provoking Behavior	9.5
SHEL Model	8.4	Reporting Errors	9.5
Professor Reason's "Swiss Cheese" Model	8.4	Aviation Safety Reporting System (ASRS)	9.5
Types of Errors in Maintenance Tasks	8.5	International Confidential Aviation Safety Systems (ICASS)	9.6
Unintended Errors	8.5	Disciplinary Policy	9.6
Slips	8.5	Non-punitive Reporting Policies	9.6
Lapses	8.5	Error Investigation	9.6
Intended Errors	8.5	Feedback	9.6
Mistakes	8.5	Why Feedback And Recognition Matters	9.6
Rule Based Mistakes	8.5	Giving Feedback For Safety	9.6
Knowledge Based Mistakes	8.6	Recognizing Safety Achievements	9.6
Violations	8.6	How to Solicit Feedback	9.6
Routine Violations	8.6	Measuring And Evaluating The Impact Of Feedback	9.7
Exceptional Violations	8.6	Assertiveness	9.7
Implications of Errors	8.6	Dealing With Emergencies	9.7
Organizational Errors	8.6	What Is An Emergency?	9.7
Maintenance Event Decision Aid (MEDA)	8.6	Preparing For Emergencies	9.7
The MEDA Philosophy	8.7	Planning Ahead	9.7
Positive Employee Intent	8.7	Responding To An Emergency	9.8
Contributions of Multiple Factors	8.7	Possible Work Related Emergencies	9.8
Manageability of Events	8.7	Breathing Emergencies	9.8
The MEDA Process	8.8	Rescue Breathing and CPR	9.8
Event	8.8	Chemical Burns	9.8
Decision	8.8	Head Injury	9.9
Investigation	8.8	Hypothermia	9.9
Prevention Strategies	8.8	Spinal Injury	9.10
Feedback	8.8	Strains, Sprains and Broken Bones	9.10
Management Resolve	8.8	Splinting	9.10
Implementing MEDA	8.8	Submodule 9 Practice Questions	9.13
The Benefits of MEDA	8.9	Submodule 9 Practice Answers	9.14
Avoiding and Managing Events	8.9		
Submodule 8 Practice Questions	8.11		
Submodule 8 Practice Answers	8.12		
9.9 SAFETY MANAGEMENT	9.1	9.10 THE 'DIRTY DOZEN' AND RISK MITIGATION	10.1
Risk Management	9.1	Risk Mitigation Methods	10.1
Occurrence Reporting	9.1	Lack of Communication	10.2
Risk Management Checklist	9.2	Complacency	10.3
Safety Culture	9.2	Lack of Knowledge	10.4
Safety Policy	9.2	Distraction	10.5
Safety Risk Management	9.2	Lack of Teamwork	10.6
Safety Assurance	9.3	Fatigue	10.7
Job Hazard Analysis	9.3	Lack of Resources	10.8
Steps To Conduct A Job Hazard Analysis	9.3	Pressure	10.9
Safety Promotion	9.3	Lack of Assertiveness	10.10
Just Culture	9.3	Stress	10.11
How Safety Culture Relates To Just Culture?	9.3	Physical Stressors	10.11
Identifying, Avoiding and Reporting Hazards	9.3	Psychological Stressors	10.11
Identifying Safety Risks	9.3	Physiological Stressors	10.11
Avoiding Hazards And Incidents	9.4	Lack of Awareness	10.12
Communicate And Consult	9.4	Norms	10.13
		Acronym Definitions	A.1
		Appendix	AP.1

Human Performance and Limitations

Submodule

2



9.2 Human Performance and Limitations

SUBMODULE KNOWLEDGE DESCRIPTIONS

SUBMODULE KNOWLEDGE DESCRIPTIONS		LEVEL
		A/B1/B2
9.2	Human Performance and Limitations Vision; Hearing; Information processing; Attention and perception; Memory; Claustrophobia and physical access.	2

9.2 HUMAN PERFORMANCE AND LIMITATIONS

INTRODUCTION

This Submodule provides an overview of physical and mental human performance factors which affect an aircraft maintenance technician's (AMTs) working environment, such as vision, hearing, information processing, attention and perception, memory, and decision making.

Just as certain mechanical components used in aircraft maintenance have limitations, technicians themselves have certain capabilities and limitations that must be considered when looking at the maintenance 'system'. For instance, rivets used to attach aluminum skin to a fuselage can withstand forces that act to pull them apart. It is clear that these rivets will eventually fail if enough force is applied to them. While the precise range of human capabilities and limitations might not be as well defined as that of mechanical or electrical components, the same principles apply in that human performance is likely to degrade and eventually 'fail' under certain conditions (e.g. stress).

Mechanical components in aircraft can, on occasion, suffer catastrophic failures. People can also fail to function properly in certain situations. Physically, humans become fatigued, are affected by cold, can break bones in workplace accidents, etc. Mentally, humans can make errors, have limited perceptual powers, can exhibit poor judgment due to lack of skills and knowledge, etc. In addition, unlike mechanical components, human performance is also affected by social and emotional factors. Therefore, failure of AMTs can also be to the detriment of aviation safety.

VISION

Vision is vital for AMTs. Think of how much is subject to visual inspection. Vision is best when ensuring appropriate lighting to illuminate the work area, and best protected by ensuring that protective eyewear is clear and suitable for use. An individual's lack of color discrimination, or defective color vision, may make it difficult to distinguish between red and green, even with

appropriate illumination. This can lead to errors in tasks such as dealing with electrical wiring.

In order to understand vision, it is useful first to know a little about the anatomy of the eye. [Figure 2-1] The basic structure of the eye is similar to a simple camera with an aperture (the iris), a lens, and a light sensitive surface (the retina). Light enters the eye through the cornea, then passes through the iris and the lens, and finally falls on the retina. Here the light stimulates the sensitive cells on the retina (rods and cones) which then pass small electrical impulses by way of the optic nerve to the visual cortex in the brain. Here, the electrical impulses are interpreted and an image is perceived.

BASIC COMPONENTS OF THE EYE

THE CORNEA

The cornea is the clear 'window' at the very front of the eye. The cornea acts as a fixed focusing device. Focusing is achieved by the shape of the cornea bending the incoming light rays. The cornea

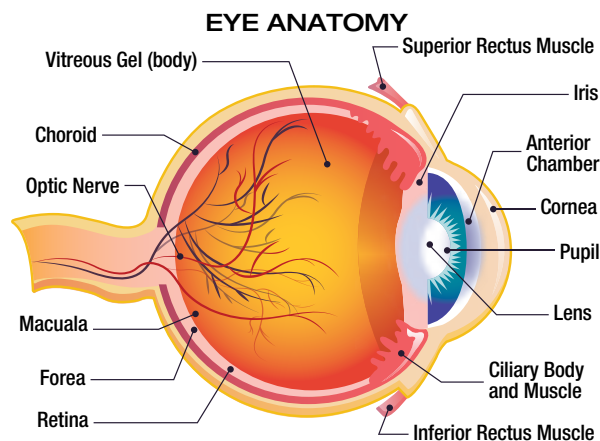


Figure 2-1. Anatomy of the human eye.

employee. Some of the causes of fatigue originate with company policies; for example, hours of work, the extent to which work is performed during the night, and the predictability of work schedules. Other causes stem from the employee's personal situation, including commuting time, family responsibilities, and the demands of second jobs.

Figure 4-10 shows some of the main sources of fatigue. Employer and employee each share responsibility for managing fatigue.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE EMPLOYER

- Schedule work hours and time off to give the employee sufficient opportunity for restorative sleep.
- Manage workload and breaks.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE EMPLOYEE

- Manage personal time to make sure you are rested and fit for duty.
- When reporting incidents, note if fatigue was a factor.

STRATEGIES TO DEAL WITH FATIGUE

Some of these might be considered common sense, but others may not be as obvious.

- **Get More Sleep:** The first and most obvious way to prevent fatigue is to get more good quality sleep. This is easier said than done, particularly if you work irregular hours, have a second job, or have young children.
- **Controlled Naps:** Numerous research studies have shown that even a brief nap can result in performance improvements. Napping used to be widely discouraged by employers, but now pilots, air traffic controllers and others are being allowed to take brief controlled naps when workload permits.

There are two types of naps:

- **Preventative Nap:** A brief sleep before you report for work, particularly before starting a night shift.
- **Restorative Nap:** A brief sleep during a break at work can sharpen your performance for the next couple of hours.

There are two problems to watch out for with naps:

- Avoid taking naps in the hours before you go to bed so as not to interfere with your main sleep period.
- Naps lasting more than about 40 minutes may produce sleep inertia, (a feeling of grogginess that may persist after awakening). The best nap duration appears to be about 20-25 minutes.

CAFFEINE

Caffeine is one of the most widely used stimulants, and if used carefully and in moderation can be part of an overall fatigue management strategy. Caffeine has a half life in the body of around five hours, so shift workers should be careful to avoid caffeine in the hours leading up to sleep. If you use caffeine to stay alert at work, use it selectively, and cut down on caffeinated drinks at other times. If you develop a tolerance to caffeine, it will not be as effective in keeping you alert.

BREAKS

If the situation allows, a brief break or a stretch can help to focus your attention and provide temporary relief from fatigue. Do not be afraid to call time out for a few minutes to clear your head. Breaks however, only provide a short term benefit. The only real remedy for fatigue is sleep.

PROGRESSIVE RESTRICTIONS

One way to deal with fatigue in maintenance is to keep those who are most fatigued away from the most critical tasks, an approach sometimes called 'progressive restrictions'. [Figure 4-11]

Some companies have internal policies progressively limiting the tasks an AMT can perform the longer they have been at work. For example, an AMT who has been on duty for longer than 12 hours might not be permitted to certify the work of others, or may not be permitted to perform engine runs or other critical tasks.

KEY POINTS

- Fatigue seriously impairs work performance and increases the chances of human error.

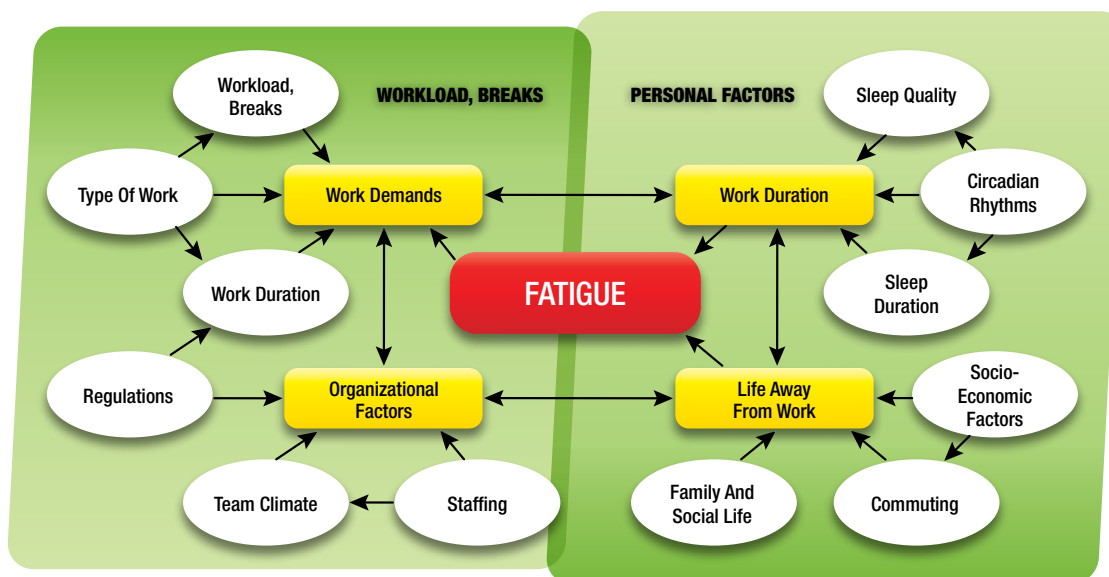


Figure 4-10. Employer and employee responsibilities for managing stress.



Figure 5-1. Two varieties of hearing protection from simple foam plugs to full earmuff; each offering protection (noise reduction) from 25–30 dB.

FUMES, CHEMICALS, TOXIC METALS AND SOLVENTS

The maintenance of aircraft involves working with a variety of hydraulic fluids, paints, cleaning compounds, and solvents. AMTs will also be exposed to aircraft fuel and exhaust. In fact, there is every possibility that an AMT could be exposed to a number of solvents and chemicals during their daily work. The following is a list of some chemicals AMTs are exposed to, and some recommended safety actions.

CHEMICALS

GASOLINE ENGINE EXHAUST (CARBON MONOXIDE)

Carbon Monoxide (CO) is both odorless and colorless. Symptoms of CO exposure are not immediately apparent, but no matter how small, any amount of exposure severely affects the function of sensitive tissues like the brain. Moderate CO poisoning results in headache, rapid breathing, nausea, weakness, confusion, and discoloration of the lips and nail beds. High exposures result in the loss of consciousness without other symptoms. Headache, nausea and vomiting start with lower exposures, while confusion and collapse, followed by death may occur with high exposure. [Figure 5-2]

Survivors of CO poisoning often show delayed effects that appear two to forty days after an apparent complete recovery. The most frequently reported symptoms are mental deterioration including apathy, disorientation, amnesia, and irritability. Other symptoms include mood disorders, unusual behaviors, irrational speech content, and gait movement disorders.

AMTs are likely to encounter CO in ground equipment, such as fueling trucks and tugs. Unlike most automobiles, exhaust from ground support trucks is usually routed to the front instead of the rear of the vehicle. Refueling trucks spend a lot of time with their engines idling, allowing more CO to enter the cab. Small engines can produce CO that is just as deadly as that produced by these larger engines. Here are some safety strategies to minimize the risks to AMTs:

- Do not allow the use or operation of gasoline powered engines or tools inside hangars, even if the doors are open, unless the engine can be located outside and away from air intakes;
- Keep engines tuned, minimizing the production of CO;
- Recognize the symptoms of CO overexposure: headache, nausea, weakness, dizziness, visual disturbance, personality changes and loss of consciousness;
- When possible, use compressed air tools or tools powered by electricity rather than those powered by a gasoline engine;
- Place a CO monitor in the work area, truck cab, cockpit, or on yourself.

A coworker exhibiting any of the mentioned signs of over exposure demands the same treatment as if the individual were found unconscious. The following actions are recommended prior to emergency room admission:

- Remove victim from the work area into fresh air;
- Note any abrasions or other evidence of trauma that may have occurred if the victim fell while unconscious;
- Administer 100% breathing oxygen if available;
- Keep victim warm and protected and prepare for transport to an emergency room.

KEROSENE BASED FUELS

Kerosene based fuels include both jet and diesel fuels. Respiratory exposures to jet fuel are low for most AMTs, but symptoms include:

- Transient memory deficit (difficulty recalling even common items such as your phone number)
- Disturbances in consciousness (slow thinking, sense of drunkenness, light headed, slurring words)
- Irritation to eyes and nose (sneezing, runny nose)
- Nausea and vomiting
- Headache
- Staggering

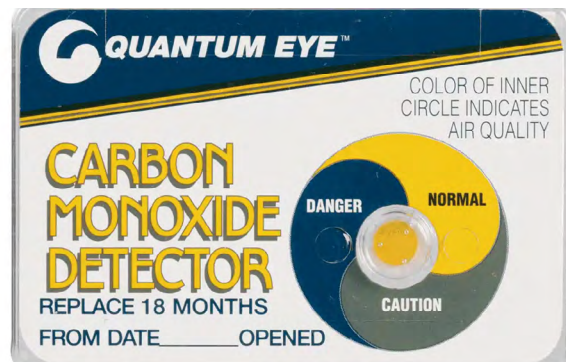


Figure 5-2. Many types of CO detectors will quickly warn of an emerging situation.

DEFECT	ACTION TAKEN	MECHANIC	INSPECTOR
Reference card 27-00-56. Card completed fully up to state D). Hydraulic system depressurized by the transmitter operating link is not reconnected. Operating link to be reconnected prior to performing stage F).			

Figure 7-4. Additional task card example.

SHIFT HANDOVER

At the point of shift change, the need for effective communication between the outgoing and incoming personnel in maintenance is extremely important. The absence of such effective communication has been evident in many accident reports from various industries, not just aircraft maintenance. While history is littered with past experiences of poor shift handover contributing to accidents and incidents there is little regulatory or guidance material regarding what constitutes a good handover process relevant to aircraft maintenance. This section attempts to provide guidelines on such a process and is drawn from work performed by the UK Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and the US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).

CONCEPTS

Effective shift handover depends on three basic elements:

- The outgoing person's ability to understand and communicate the important elements of the job or task being passed over to the incoming person.
- The incoming person's ability to understand and assimilate the information being provided by the outgoing person.
- A formalized process for exchanging information between outgoing and incoming people and a place for such exchanges to take place.

The US Department of Energy shift handover standards stress two characteristics that must be present for effective shift handover to take place: ownership and formality. Individuals must assume personal ownership and responsibility for the tasks they perform. They must want to ensure that their tasks are completed correctly, even when those tasks extend across shifts and are completed by somebody else. The opposite of this mental attitude is "It didn't happen on my shift", which essentially absolves the outgoing person from all responsibility for what happens on the next shift.

Formality relates to the level of recognition given to the shift handover procedures. Formalism exists when the shift handover process is defined in the Maintenance Organization Exposition (MOE) and managers and supervisors are committed to ensuring that cross shift information is effectively delivered. Demonstrable commitment is important as workers quickly perceive a lack of management commitment when they fail to provide ample shift overlap time, adequate job aids and dedicated facilities for the handovers to take place.

In such cases the procedures are just seen as the company covering themselves as they don't consider the matter important enough to spend effort and money.

AIDS TO EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AT SHIFT HANDOVER

There are certain processes, practices and skills aids that have been found to be effective communication at shift handover.

People have to physically transmit information in written, spoken or gestured (nonverbal or body language) form. If only one medium is used there is a risk of erroneous transmission. The introduction of redundancy, by using more than one way of communicating i.e. written, verbal or nonverbal, greatly reduces this risk. For this reason information should be repeated via more than one medium. For example verbal and one other method such as written or diagrams etc. The availability of feedback, to allow testing of comprehension etc., during communication increases the accuracy. The ability for two way communication to take place is therefore important at shift handover. [Figure 7-5]

A part of the shift handover process is to facilitate the formulation of a shared mental model of the maintenance system, aircraft configuration, tasks in work etc. Misunderstandings are most likely to occur when people do not have this same 'mental picture' of the state of things. This is particularly true when deviations from normal working has occurred such as having the aircraft in the flight mode at a point in a maintenance check when this is not normally done. Other considerations are when people have returned following a lengthy absence (the state of things could have changed considerably during this time) and when handovers are carried out between experienced and inexperienced personnel (experienced people may make assumptions about their knowledge that may not be true of inexperienced people). In all these cases handovers can be expected to take longer and time should be allowed for.



Figure 7-5. A successful shift handover employs multiple forms of verbal and written communication and best takes place at the work site.

INCIDENT

On March 20, 2001 a Lufthansa Airbus A320 almost crashed shortly after takeoff because of reversed wiring in the captain's sidestick flight control. Quick action by the copilot, whose sidestick was not faulty, prevented a crash.

CAUSE

The investigation has focused on maintenance on the captain's control carried out by Lufthansa Technik just before the flight. During the previous flight, a problem with one of the two elevator/aileron computers had occurred. An electrical pin in the connector was found to be damaged and was replaced. It has been confirmed that two pairs of pins inside the connector has accidentally been crossed during the repair. This changed the polarity in the sidestick and the respective control channels "bypassing" the control unit, which might have sensed the error and would have triggered a warning. Clues might have been seen on the electronic centralized aircraft monitor screen during the flight control checks, but often pilots only check for a deflection indication, not the direction. Before the aircraft left the hangar, a flight control check was performed by the mechanic, but only using the first officer's sidestick.

Figure 8-11. Electrical wiring discrepancies to include cross connections. A description of a Lufthansa Airbus A320 that almost crashed due to reversed wiring of the flight controls.

INCIDENT

Alaska Airlines Flight 261, a McDonnell Douglas MD-83 aircraft, experienced a fatal accident on January 31, 2000, in the Pacific Ocean. The two pilots, three cabin crew members, and 83 passengers were killed and the aircraft was destroyed.

CAUSE

The subsequent investigation by the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) determined that inadequate maintenance led to excessive wear and catastrophic failure of a critical flight control system during flight. The probable cause was stated to be "a loss of airplane pitch control resulting from the inflight failure of the horizontal stabilizer trim system jackscrew assembly's acme nut threads. The thread failure was caused by excessive wear resulting from Alaska Airlines insufficient lubrication of the jackscrew assembly."

Figure 8-12. Failure to Lubricate. A description of Alaska Airlines Flight 261 that crashed due to insufficient lubrication of the jackscrew assembly.

improperly labeled parts"; and "management can fix the factors that contribute to the events".

Since the introduction of MEDA, a growing number of related maintenance organizations have also adopted MEDA; a tool for investigating the factors that lead to an event, and making suggested improvements to reduce the likelihood of future events. MEDA was designed to process and help maintenance organizations identify why these events occur and how to prevent them in the future. Successful implementation of MEDA requires an understanding of the following:

- The MEDA Philosophy
- The MEDA Process
- Management Resolve
- Implementing MEDA
- The benefits of MEDA

THE MEDA PHILOSOPHY

Traditional efforts to investigate events are often aimed at identifying the employee who made an error. This usually results in an employee who is defensive and subjected to a combination of disciplinary action and recurrent training. Because retraining often adds little or no value to what the employee already knows, it may be ineffective in preventing future events. In addition, by the time the employee is identified, information about the factors that contributed to the event have been lost. Because the factors that contributed to the event remain unchanged, the event is likely to recur, setting what is called the "blame and train" cycle in motion.

To break this cycle, MEDA was developed in order to assist investigators to look for factors that contribute to the event, rather than concentrate upon the employee who made the error. The MEDA philosophy is based on these principles:

- Positive employee intent (maintenance technicians want to do the best job possible and do not make errors intentionally).
- Contributions of multiple factors (a series of factors contribute to events).
- Manageability of events; (most of the factors that contribute to an event can be managed).

POSITIVE EMPLOYEE INTENT

This principle is key to a successful investigation. Traditional "blame and train" investigations assume that errors result from individual carelessness or incompetence. Starting instead from the assumption that even careful employees can make errors, MEDA interviewers can gain the active participation of the technicians closest to the event. When technicians feel that their competence is not in question and that their contributions will not be used in disciplinary actions against them or their fellow employees, they willingly team with investigators to identify the factors that contribute to events and suggest solutions. By following this principle, operators can replace a negative "blame and train" pattern with a positive "blame the process, not the person" practice.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF MULTIPLE FACTORS

Technicians who perform maintenance tasks on a daily basis are often aware of factors that contribute to the event. These include information that is difficult to understand such as work cards or maintenance manuals, inadequate lighting, poor communication between work shifts, and aircraft design. Technicians may even have their own strategies for addressing these factors. One of the objectives of MEDA investigation is to discover these successful strategies and share them with the entire maintenance operation.

MANAGEABILITY OF EVENTS

Active involvement of the technicians closest to the event reflects the MEDA principle that most of the factors that contribute to an event can be managed. Processes can be changed, procedures improved or corrected, facilities enhanced, and best practices shared. Because events most often result from a series of contributing factors, correcting or removing just one or two of these factors can prevent the event from recurring.