

Funding Approved for Maintenance of Way Fatigue Study

On May 14, 2004 the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) issued OMB Control Number No. 2130-0561 approving data collection for a fatigue study entitled, *Work Schedules and Sleep Patterns of Maintenance of Way Employees*. This study was first announced in the Jan./Feb. 2004 edition of the BMW Journal. The fatigue study, sponsored by the FRA and supported by the BMW, is being conducted by the independent firm of Foster-Miller, Inc. of Waltham, MA.

The overall purpose of the study is to develop a better understanding of the work/rest schedules and sleep patterns of maintenance of way workers and to evaluate the relationship between these schedules and fatigue. Foster-Miller has recently mailed a survey form and log book to 845 randomly selected BMW members nationwide asking them to fill out the survey and keep a work/sleep diary for two weeks. Participants will be asked to document commute times, work hours, meal periods, and call outs. They will also be asked to comment on the circumstances involving overnight accommodations when held away from home on company business. Those who complete and submit their diaries and questionnaires to Foster-Miller will receive a \$75 gift certificate in appreciation for participating in the survey.

“Fatigue is a huge factor in our industry,” says Fred Simpson, Acting President of the BMW. “The expansion of territories, the erratic on-call status of BMW members, work week variations, and inadequate away from home lodging and meal arrangements contribute to an environment where fatigue is the norm. This study is expected to independently document what many BMW members have known for years: Job-related fatigue is an issue within the maintenance of way craft. Once the causes and effects of fatigue within the maintenance of way craft are documented and analyzed through this study, we can then work to address those issues in an appropriate manner.”

Results from the study will be reported to the BMW and FRA only as a whole, not individually. Foster-Miller will delete the names of all participants once the data has been compiled and participants have received their gift certificates.

The study has two primary purposes: (1) It aims to document and characterize the work/rest schedules and sleep patterns of maintenance of way workers (both production and headquartered employees); and, (2) It intends to examine the relationship between these schedules and the level of alertness/fatigue of individuals who work these schedules under various conditions.

FRA has recently conducted similar studies involving train and engine personnel and railroad signalman. BMW Acting President Simpson stated, “I encourage members to participate in this survey study. We will need widespread membership participation in order to collect statistically relevant data. Over the years, we have tried to get the industry to address a number of conditions that contribute to fatigue in the maintenance of way craft. I am confident that this study will help document the relationship between work schedules/working conditions and fatigue. Once the study results are in, I am hopeful that we can utilize the data to address those conditions that contribute unnecessarily to fatigue among BMW members.”

BMW will publish a summary of the survey results in a future edition of the Journal once the study is completed.

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