

Sleeping policemen

Police chiefs should allow tired officers time to sleep while on duty to prevent potential accidents happening, a health expert has claimed.

Officers should be able to nap on the job for up to 40 minutes at a time, according to Karen Lansing, a trauma risk and psych adviser.

Delegates at the annual Police Federation of England and Wales conference in Bournemouth, heard how sleep deprivation can cause slow reactions, poor memory and indecisive decision making.

Ms Lansing warned that over-tired officers, particularly those working long night shifts, risked falling into a state called “micro sleep mode”. This is where the brain switches off for between two and ten seconds and could have potentially fatal consequences, especially for traffic officers operating a vehicle.

However, “cat naps” were touted as a way to stave off tiredness, making officers more alert and better prepared to handle dangerous situations.

Ms Lansing referred to a study of officers where half worked a 12-hour shift with no sleep and the rest were entitled to a 40-minute snooze. Both groups were tested for vigilance, memory, mood, and on task performance. They were also given a driving simulation test.

“Nap subjects found they had quicker reaction times, fewer lapses in vigilance, more vigour, less fatigue, and less sleeplessness when they went home,” Lansing said. “They were able to more quickly complete a simple job performance task. Naps help.”

She added: “You need to sleep to be at your peak performance. It doesn’t work on four hours a night. If you’re tired you are going to be hesitant.”

Police service is not a ‘business’

Policing with less resources will have dire consequences and culling backroom staff will not save the frontline, warned economics expert Professor Roger Seifert.

Speaking to thousands of police officers during a session on police performance at the Police Federation’s Conference, he said politicians would want ‘more for less’.

“The police service is not a business; it is not there to make money...it’s a public service,” he told a panel which included Peter Neyroud, chief executive of the National Policing Improvement Agency.

He added: “We all want the most effective police service...what they do not want, what they [the public] are not interested in ...is being efficient about it.”

Mr Seifert, professor of industrial relations and human relations at the University of Wolverhampton, said the public want the best service.

He used the analogy of the public looking to a surgeon carrying out an operation – you would want a professional with a ‘sharpened knife’ and the ‘best anaesthetic’ not ‘want some guy with a slightly blunt knife saying, “hell, I’ll give it a go.”’

He added: “It is absolutely essential the civilianisation programme is stopped and reversed,” but added that cutting backroom staff was not the answer and it would not guarantee the frontline would not be slashed.

Police officers are looking at an ‘intensification of their work, different shift patterns, more flexibility’, said Mr Seifert in a ‘Martini solution’ where police officers will be used ‘anytime, any place, anywhere’.

Mr Neyroud said that there were cuts that could be made in the back office as it does ‘cut off the budgets for police officers’ – streamlining people involved in double-checking figures and audits.

Cat naps: Karen Lansing says officers should get 40 winks



Photography: Anderson Photography

Prof Seifert: policing could be on the rocks if officers are used ‘anytime, any place, anywhere’



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