

Sleep disruption: an operational risk in LOA programs

Sleep-related incidents reported via UPLOADS from September 2018 until March 2026

Sleep-related incidents included any incident description where sleep was clearly disturbed. For example, an instructor being woken in the middle of the night by a sick participant would be included but an incident which reports a "participant felt better after a good night sleep" would not be included.

Consequences of poor sleep for LOA leader performance:

- Increased physical and/or mental fatigue
- Reduced supervision quality and attention
- Impaired dynamic risk assessment
- Irritability, mood swings, reduced stress tolerance
- Slower reaction times and lower energy
- Poorer communication with peers
- Higher risk of leader injury

386 incidents of disrupted sleep were reported

Sleep disruptions were reported during a range of LOAs for leaders and participants, the top four activities were:

- Camping/Campsites: 184
- Bushwalking/Hiking: 50
- Down time: 25
- Canoeing: 12



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September, 2018 to March, 2026

Australian National Incident Dataset

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Data are reported from the National Incident Dataset
with UPLOADS reporting restrictions applied

Fatigue is a safety-critical risk

- Regulators see fatigue as a foreseeable workplace hazard
- Sleep disrupted on LOA programs should be documented and managed
- Controls should be planned *before* programs begin, not addressed reactively
- Fatigue affects all roles: managers, instructors, leaders, teachers
- Participant sleep disruption and fatigue should be considered when reviewing activity demands, supervision, pace and program changes

*Sleep disruption is rarely blamed for an incident, but it can quietly undermine the judgement, supervision, and resilience needed to prevent one.
Consider cumulative sleep loss across consecutive nights, days, and programs - not only a single disrupted night.*

Potential operational controls for LOA providers to manage sleep disruption and subsequent fatigue:

Roster night duties thoughtfully

Rotate evening and overnight duties. Avoid scheduling the same leader for consecutive night duty and full-day activity.

Plan realistic leader rest breaks

Build structured rest periods into program schedule. Rest time for leaders should be protected as much as possible.

Do not allocate driving to fatigued staff

Consider alternate drivers, transport providers, program modification, additional rest, or overnight accommodation.

Build in start-time contingencies

Allow for delayed starts where participant illness or disturbances have shortened leader sleep. Rigid schedules increase risk.

Roster extra support where needed

If participant needs are likely to disturb leader sleep (illness, challenging cohorts), plan additional staffing in advance if possible.

Have an escalation plan ready

Establish a clear process if a leader is unfit for safety critical duties due to fatigue. This should be agreed before the program starts.



Leaders must report concerns about their fitness for duty. Program managers must monitor foreseeable fatigue, check leader fitness, and adjust duties, staffing, driving or program plans where required.