



Operational Stress Control

Alternative Watch Schedule

3-9 Watch Rotation

“Fatigue is a major factor in many mishaps and can contribute to injury, equipment damage, and loss of life. The 3/9 watch rotation can be a tremendous tool to combat fatigue.”

Captain John Davenport,
commanding officer, Naval Safety Center

The 3/9 Watchbill: “A Sea Change” in Readiness

In the Surface Warfare community, fatigue is a common factor in many mishaps and near misses, are often simply accepted as a “cost of doing business”. Traditional watch rotations, which do not account for circadian rhythm or sleep patterns, are a large contributor to fatigue. The 3/9 watch rotation solves several issues with a simple paradigm shift: build the schedule around the people that execute it and the mission that it supports.

The 3/9 Watchbill **Design**

- Requires 4 watch teams
- 3 hour watch periods
- 9 hour period between watches allows at least 6 hrs sleep each night
- Watch teams stand the same watch every day
- Rotation shifts one watch every other Sunday

The 3/9 Watchbill **Benefits**

- Stable routine allows circadian rhythm and sleep pattern
- Stable routine allows simpler daily work and PT routine
- Watch Teams can be aligned (Bridge/CIC/Engineering)
- 9 hour period between watches allows at least 6 hrs sleep each night
- Relatively short 3 hour watch promotes alert watch standers
- Engineers spend less time in a heat stress environment



“ The improvement in watch stander alertness was noticeable from the first week after this rotation was implemented. Feedback from the crew was very positive, but it required a great deal of commitment to avoid slipping back into the old routine. The results were outstanding – where it counts, in accomplishing the mission.”

Capt. John Cordle, former commanding officer, USS San Jacinto
2010 BUMED “Epictetus” Award recipient for innovative leadership

What are the **Challenges**? There are a few but they can be mitigated:

- Shorter watches mean a higher turnover – more churn
- Daily routine must be modified to allow early taps and late reveille for late watches
- Not all rates can support 4 qualified sections

Some **“Best Practices”** to ease adaptation of the 3/9 Watchbill

- Modify meal hours to accommodate breakfast for 0600-0900 watches
- Schedule routine meetings between 0900-1500
- Schedule daily Ops briefs during afternoon
- Move Divisional Quarters to late morning or after lunch



“ I had just told a SWOS PCO class that there was no way to meet all the heat stress requirements (twice the time out of the plant as on watch, 6 hours of sleep per night) on a warship underway. The 3/9 watch rotation proved me wrong.”

Capt. Neil Parrott, former commanding officer, Surface Warfare Officers School