

SUBSTANCE ABUSE IN THE WORKPLACE

Your workers use equipment, handle materials, & perhaps drive vehicles whether they work in your office, warehouse, factory, or jobsite. Regardless of the hazards of their tasks, they need to be mentally alert for the sake of their safety & health, the safety & health of coworkers, their productivity, & your profitability. Workers under the influence of alcohol, illegal drugs, & even legal drugs (*e.g. sinus pills that cause drowsiness*) are not fully mentally alert. They endanger themselves, their coworkers, you, your customers, & other nearby persons. The Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration estimated in 1995 that abuse of alcohol & other drugs cost U.S. businesses \$102 billion yearly due to lost productivity, accidents, worker turnover, & other problems. The National Institute on Drug Abuse estimated in 1995 that 10-23% of American workers use dangerous drugs on the job. They report these employees are:

- Up to 4 times more likely to be in a work accident
- 5 times more likely to file a Work Comp claim
- 2 1/2 times more likely to be absent for 8+ days.

This sheet addresses some basics of a substance abuse policy. It is not all-encompassing. The National Safety Council or a local chapter of Alcoholics Anonymous can help you in preventing problems as well as identifying & caring for problem workers. Your attorney can help you draft & implement a policy that protects you as you protect your workers.

Substance abuse policy basics include:

1. Clear comprehensive written policy

(You may wish to involve workers in drafting the policy; they may have valuable ideas.)

State why you have implemented your policy (*showing you care for them can increase their loyalty to you & make them more likely to adhere to the policy*)

State specifically the behaviors that are banned (*e.g. using or selling illegal drugs on the job; operating machines or vehicles while under the influence of any illegal drug, alcohol, or legal drug causing drowsiness*)

State specifically the consequences for workers who violate the policy (*e.g. day off without pay; mandatory attendance at rehabilitation class; job transfer; termination*)

2. Train supervisors/foremen

Give them details of your policy

Train them in identifying signs of substance abuse

Train them how to enforce your policy

3. Train employees

(Let them know substance abuse will not be tolerated. As they talk with friends & others, word will

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get out that substance abuse is not tolerated in your company.)

Give copy of your policy to all existing personnel

Give copy of your policy to all new hires

Train them in signs, symptoms, & perils of drug abuse

4. Conduct substance abuse testing

(This can deter substance abuse & help you identify workers who have problems)

Consult with your attorney about applicable laws

Use only trained persons to do testing

5. Implement an employee assistance program

Use trained persons for this *(many firms offer this service on a contractual basis)*

Many employees feeling stress *(e.g. financial, marital)* benefit from this counseling & avoid resorting to alcohol or drugs

Whatever you specify in your policy, be sure to set an example for your workers by obeying it to the letter. Workers are more likely to obey your policy if they see you obeying it. Enforce your policy, too. Workers are more likely to obey it if they learn that violations will not be tolerated. Review your policy periodically & revise as your needs require.