

Alcohol and drugs

Alcohol and drug use in the workplace affects each and every one of us.

Any time someone is working under the influence of drugs or alcohol, it endangers the rest of us at work— as well as the customers and the public.

There is a tendency to consider substance abuse as a private matter, but in the workplace it is definitely not. You have a right and a responsibility to prevent drug and alcohol abuse on the job.

There is no typical drug abuse scenario in the workplace, but here are a few possibilities:

- An openly intoxicated employee who is operating machinery.
- A worker who is hung-over from last night's drinking.
- A co-worker who is operating on little or no sleep because of drug use.
- A fellow worker who is maintaining a steady "buzz" throughout the working day by sipping alcohol during breaks and the lunch period.
- A couple of people who slip away to a storage room to light up a joint now and then.
- A worker who does not understand tranquilizers can cause impairment — after all, his doctor prescribed them.
- An equipment operator who does not know the cold remedy he bought at the drug store has affected his ability to work with a clear head.
- Someone who uses cocaine supposedly to improve performance, not realizing it is causing radical mood shifts and irrational behavior.

Because the people we work with are often our friends, and sometimes our supervisors, it is hard to consider

reporting their substance abuse. But keep in mind their behavior could cause a fatal mistake — and you could be a victim.

Co-workers can get caught in the trap of covering up for a drug user, by doing his work, by making excuses to the boss and by loaning him money. But these things do not really help a person with a drug problem; in fact, they delay recovery from an addiction.

Many employers have strict policies regarding drug use, including drug testing. Many companies institute assistance programs to help employees fight drug problems. These programs provide confidential counseling and treatment referrals — and include job security. Some such programs are operated through the joint efforts of

labor groups, industrial councils and company management. Help may be available to family members as well.

Besides these avenues, there are many community programs for treatment of drug and alcohol problems. Some are government-funded and some are private. Others are run by volunteers or as self-help support groups. The Yellow Pages should have listings of treatment alternatives in your area.

You have a right to a safe workplace. You have a right to be free of the kinds of dangers caused by substance abuse at work. Any person working under the influence of drugs and alcohol should be reported immediately. It will probably be one of the hardest things you ever have to do. But it will be worth it in the long run if it saves someone from injury or death



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