



# The Supervisor Connection

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The National Drug-Free Workplace Alliance  
A division of Drug Free America Foundation, Inc.



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Drug Free America Foundation is a 501(c)(3) organization committed to developing, promoting and sustaining global strategies, policies and laws that will reduce illegal drug use, drug addiction, drug-related injury and death.



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## Crisis Management

Having a drug-free workplace program in place is the best line of defense against alcohol- or drug-related problems in your workplace. Situations involving alcohol and other drugs can be difficult to manage. It is important to move forward with extreme caution in addressing any problems while documenting your observations and actions. Although every crisis is different, here is an example of some basic steps to take in addressing a drug and/or alcohol incident:

Suppose a supervisor encounters an employee who is disoriented and smells of alcohol. The following are some steps that the supervisor can take:

- Escort the employee to a private area to inquire about the behavior.
- If possible, call in another supervisor or manager who can serve as a reliable witness.
- Inform the employee of your concerns and get his or her explanation;
- Notify senior management.
- Arrange for the employee to be escorted to the lab for drug and alcohol tests.
- Place the employee on suspension until drug and alcohol test results are returned and a formal investigation takes place.
- Arrange for the employee to be escorted home.

*Remember, if the employee is in no shape to work, he/she is in no shape to drive.*

To investigate a potential drug/alcohol crisis situation, the supervisor should answer the following questions:

1. What exactly do you see?
2. Have you observed signs or symptoms consistent with possible drug or alcohol abuse? If so, what are they? (e.g. smells, appearance, movements or actions, balance, speech, etc.)
3. Does there appear to be illegal activity, policy violations or very unusual behavior taking place?
4. Is a group of people involved or a single employee?
5. Are you the direct supervisor to anyone involved in the incident?
6. Are reliable witnesses available?
7. Is any physical danger involved in taking action or not taking action?

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Continued from Page One

8. Are there existing policies that apply to the situation?
9. Does the situation require expert consultation from human resources, security or law enforcement?
10. Have you (and witnesses) documented what you see and what you have done in response?

If an employer observes the illegal distribution, possession, sale, transportation or manufacturing of what appears to be controlled and dangerous substances on his/her property, local law enforcement should be contacted for assistance. These situations usually result in a uniformed officer responding to conduct an investigation, make an arrest (if appropriate) and prepare a report. Due to the limited resources of most local law enforcement agencies, they may not be able to conduct lengthy undercover investigations. If such a response is necessary, the employer has the option of contracting the services of a private security investigator.

Enforcement strategies should be well thought out and planned ahead. Consistent, detailed documentation must be maintained in the event that criminal prosecution results from workplace behavior. In addition, your documentation will also be used for possible documentation in denial of workers' compensation insurance claims or unemployment compensation claims (if the employee is eventually terminated based upon your company policy).

Situations involving alcohol and other drugs can be difficult to manage, especially if you do not yet have a drug-free workplace policy in place. It is important to proceed with caution and to document any actions you take. For more information on obtaining or managing a comprehensive drug-free workplace program, please contact the National Drug-Free Workplace Alliance (NDWA) at [info@ndwa.org](mailto:info@ndwa.org) or visit our web site at [www.ndwa.org](http://www.ndwa.org).

Careful advance planning and knowledge of your company program and policies will help to ensure that you are ready to meet any future crisis.

## ***The Supervisor's Role and Responsibilities***

The role of the supervisor is traditionally a difficult one. You must fulfill various responsibilities to your employees, work group and organization. You also are responsible for ensuring the work is carried out in such a way that no one's security, safety or health is jeopardized.

As a supervisor, you have the day-to-day responsibility for what goes on in the workplace. Therefore, you play a critical role in supporting the drug-free workplace program and enforcing the policy. However, you are not expected to perform the role of police officer or counselor. Your primary role is as an observer. You watch the employees' job performance to ensure that all necessary tasks are completed in accordance with specifications and deadlines.

In your supervisory capacity, you are responsible for seeing that the work of your staff meets established performance standards. Your supervisory role is clear. When an employee begins to show a consistent pattern of problem behavior, you must take action. Focusing on job performance, even when you think the problem may be caused by substance abuse, allows you to balance:

- *the rights of the individual employee to privacy and fair treatment; and*
- *the rights of the work group to a safe, secure and productive environment.*

It is important to be consistent with all employees. Don't play favorites. Be fair when evaluating situations and employees. As a supervisor, you should establish levels of performance expected from all employees. What is acceptable? What is not? You should make clear to employees exactly what is expected of them.