



The Employee Connection

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



Workplace Drugs and Alcohol? Why Worry?

Every employee should be concerned because the person working next to you might be drunk, high, or hung over.

Of the 19 million current illicit drug users aged 18 or older in 2011, 65.7 percent (or 13.1 million persons) were employed either full or part time.

The rate of current alcohol use was 64.3 percent for full-time employed adults aged 18 or older in 2011.

Most binge and heavy alcohol users* were employed in 2011. Among 56.5 million adult binge drinkers, 42.1 million (74.4 percent) were employed either full or part time. Among 15.5 million heavy drinkers, 11.6 million (74.9 percent) were employed.

Substance-abusing workers bring their problems to work, impacting all employees. They increase the risk of accidents and injuries both to themselves and co-workers, reduce productivity, increase insurance costs both for health claims and liability, and reduce company profits.

What is substance abuse?

People who are dependent on illicit drugs such as heroin, cocaine, crack, or even marijuana, who must have these powerful drugs to make it through the day—are substance abusers. People who are physically addicted may suffer from severe and painful symptoms of withdrawal when denied their substance of choice. Psychological dependence is equally responsible for habitual drug use.

There is a range of substance abuse behaviors that are typical with substance abuse and dependency. Abusers may regularly imbibe in heavy and binge drinking, along with the misuse or abuse of prescription drugs.** Substance abuse includes any drug or alcohol use that compromises physical or mental health, hinders relationships, or diminishes the capacity to meet personal obligations.

Are jobs threatened?

Substance abuse doesn't have to take place on company premises for it to have a negative effect. When compared to non-abusing coworkers, abusers are:

- Absent from work 10 times more often.

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- Involved in workplace accidents 3.6 times more frequently.
- Five times more likely to injure themselves or another in the process.
- Likely to file workers' compensation claims five times more often.
- One-third less productive.
- Likely to have health care costs that are three times as high.

Driving, operating machinery or working in dangerous conditions while under the influence of alcohol or drugs is clearly high-risk. The danger increases with greater intoxication and compromises motor skills, reflexes, and judgment. Up to 40% of industrial fatalities and 47% of industrial injuries are linked to alcohol.

Be proactive and address health and safety before there is a problem!

- Know your company's drug-free workplace policy.
- Be familiar with safety practices on the job.

Know Your Company's Accident Reporting Policy and Procedures

Every company should have a process in place to report accidents, incidents or "near misses." Any of these, no matter how slight the injury or damage, should be reported to the department supervisor immediately for appropriate action and to track causes. This process requires the cooperation of every employee. Typically, the supervisor is responsible for taking follow-up action, including obtaining medical care for injured employees, completing an investigation, and reporting to management. They are also obliged to recommend and implement corrective actions. The purpose of the investigation is to prevent future occurrences. Employees that fail to follow the company's safety procedures or policy on reporting accidents, incidents or "near misses" may be subject to disciplinary action. It is a *responsibility* of every employee to be aware of and engage company safety practices.

- Share safety concerns with your supervisor.
- Participate in company wellness programs.
- Utilize your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) if your company has one.
- Join your company's safety committee or form one if there isn't one.

** **Binge drinking** is defined by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) as a pattern of drinking that brings a person's blood alcohol concentration (BAC) to 0.08 grams percent or above. This typically happens when men consume 5 or more drinks, and when women consume 4 or more drinks, in about 2 hours. The CDC typically defines **heavy drinking** for men as consuming an average of more than 2 drinks per day. For women, heavy drinking is typically defined as consuming an average of more than 1 drink per day.*

*** **Prescription drug abuse** means taking a prescription drug that is not prescribed for you, or taking it for reasons or in dosages other than as prescribed. Abuse of prescription drugs can produce serious health effects, including addiction.*

For more information:

Check out our National Drug-Free Workplace Alliance website at : www.ndwa.org

Social drinkers – not the hard-core alcoholics or problem drinkers – are responsible for most of the lost productivity in the workplace.

Mangione, T.W.; Howland, J.; Amick, B.; et al. Employee drinking practices and work performance. Journal of Studies on Alcohol 60(2):261–270, 1999

Workplace tips...

Don't enable substance abusers

When you participate in concealing substance abuse, you are protecting the abuser from consequences and delaying the opportunity for them to receive help. You may think you are doing them a favor, but in actuality, you and your co-workers' safety is at risk.