Safety Meeting

Talks Zone



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Coping with substance abuse

It is no secret that safety and performance suffer when employees abuse alcohol and/or drugs. Studies have shown consistently that it can cost workplaces billions of dollars in lost productivity, injuries, medical costs and liability.

Whether it occurs on or off the job, substance abuse been linked with a long list of workplace problems that include:

- Tardiness, absenteeism.
- Needless risk taking, unsafe work practices.
- Productivity/service problems.
- Poor decision making.
- Workplace injuries, vehicle or pedestrian crashes and liability risks.
- Poor morale, frustration, stress, deteriorating work relationships.
- Criminal activity in the workplace, such as selling illicit drugs.
- Compensation claims, cost of replacing or repairing damaged property, cost of replacing/retaining employees and poor public relations for managers.
- Violence in the home or community.
- Chronic diseases such as high blood pressure, cancer and liver disease.
- Death.

Social and health problems affect people at all levels of an organization. If those problems aren't resolved, some will turn to alcohol or drugs (and even drugs obtained through prescription can interfere with job performance). Danger arises when an individual can't think clearly or becomes distracted.

There are work-related factors that can lead to substance abuse. Among them:



- High stress.
- Low job satisfaction.
- Long hours or irregular shifts.
- Fatigue.
- Repetitious duties.
- Periods of inactivity or boredom.
- Isolation.
- Remote or irregular supervision.
- Easy access to substances

Finding effective treatment for and prevention of substance abuse is difficult. Most abusers believe they can stop on their own, but a majority who try do not succeed. Research shows that long-term drug use alters brain function and strengthens compulsions to use drugs. This craving continues even after usage stops.

Due to these ongoing cravings, the most important component of treatment (also called recovery) is preventing relapse.

Treating substance abuse depends on both the person and the substance being used.

Friends and family may be among the first to recognize the signs of abuse. Early recognition increases chances for successful treatment.

In the workplace, it is important for everyone to recognize the symptoms. Here are the most commonly abused substances and their effects:

Alcohol (beer, wine, spirits): impaired judgement, slowed reflexes, impaired motor function, sleepiness or drowsiness, coma, overdose may be fatal.

Cannabis (marijuana, hashish): distorted sense of time, impaired memory, impaired coordination.

Depressants (sleeping medicines, sedatives, some tranquilizers): inattention, slowed reflexes, depression, impaired balance, drowsiness, coma, overdose may be fatal.

Hallucinogens (LSD, PCP, mescaline): inattention, sensory illusions, hallucinations, disorientation, psychosis.

Inhalants (hydrocarbons, solvents, gasoline): intoxication similar to alcohol, dizziness, headache.

Opiates (morphine, heroin, codeine, some prescription pain medications): loss of interest, "nodding." If used by injection, the sharing of needles may spread Hepatitis B, or C and HIV/AIDS.

Stimulants (cocaine, amphetamines — including 'crystal meth'): elevated mood, overactivity, tension/anxiety, rapid heartbeat, constriction of blood vessels.

Be aware that any of these symptoms can point to problems other than substance abuse. Physical or mental illnesses, increased stress or lack of sleep all can cause similar responses. Consider this carefully before taking any action.

However, you should also appreciate the implications of doing nothing if you believe a co-worker is having problems with alcohol or drugs.

Covering for the mistakes and poor productivity of a drinker or drug user puts your own safety and that of fellow workers at risk. Don't be an "enabler."

The material contained in this document has been prepared from sources believed to be accurate and reliable. Application of this information to a specific worksite should be reviewed by a safety professional. Anyone making use of the information set forth herein does so at their own risk and assumes any and all liability arising therefrom. Specific medical advice should be obtained through consultation with a physician or other trained health care practitioner.

Alcohol and Drugs

The Quiz

These questions are meant to help you remember what was discussed today — not to test your patience or challenge your intelligence. The answers are at the bottom of the page. Cover them up, and complete the quiz as quickly as you can.



Substance abuse has been linked to many problems in the workplace.

Irue

False



Can prescription drugs interfere with job performance?

Yes

No



Which of these work-related factors can lead to substance abuse:

- A. Low job satisfaction.
- B. Long hours or irregular shifts.
- C. Repetitious duties.
- D. Isolation.
- E. All of the above.



Preventing relapse is the most important component of treating substance addiction.

True False



Which of these is likely to be among the first to recognize the symptoms of alcohol or drug abuse.

- A. The police.
- B. A doctor.
- C. Friends and family.
- D. Pets.



Distorted sense of time is a common effect of cannabis use.

True False



Which of these are among drugs known as opiates:

- A. Mescaline.
- B. Morphine.
- C. Heroin.
- D. Codeine.
- E. Cocaine.



Does your workplace provide access to an employee assistance program for those with substance abuse problems?

Yes

No

Don't Know

ANSWERS: J. True, Z. Yes., 3. E., 4. True, 5. C., 6. True, 7. B., C., D., 8. Your answer

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(!)Hold TheseThoughts

While the use of alcohol and illicit drugs seems to be high according to surveys, there are very few studies that actually measure the extent to which drugs cause workplace injuries. Even so, a strong perception exists that this is significant, and that risk of impairment is widespread.

Another area of concern is the extent to which work injuries occur from impairment due to the use of prescription or over-the counter medications, since this type of drug use in society is extensive. Drugs such as painkillers and decongestants have well-known side effects that include drowsiness and impaired judgment.

In response to workplace health and safety concerns, many employers have policies and procedures that include testing for alcohol and other drugs. In addition to ethical, moral and legal issues, misconceptions exist regarding the ability of testing to indicate whether a worker is able to safely carry out the tasks of an assigned job. While using alcohol or other drugs can lead to unacceptable risk when job duties are performed, and while worker testing can detect the presence of such substances, this doesn't necessarily mean the person within whom a substance is detected is impaired at

The effects of a particular substance on an individual depend on its chemical properties, how it enters the body (via ingestion, inhalation or injection), the amount taken over a given period of time and the presence of other drugs in the body. For example, the effects of substances such as tranquilizers or analgesics will differ in timing and intensity if ingested rather than injected directly into the bloodstream.

 Alberta Advisory Committee on Impairment in the Workplace



Safety Meeting For the Record



Date of Meeting:	Topic:
Location:	Department:
Start Time: Finish Time:	Meeting Leader:
In Attendance:	

Tips for Safety Meeting Leaders

Don't just talk about it. If unsafe practices have been identified during your meeting, take steps to correct them as soon as possible, and ensure that all employees understand the consequences for failing to adhere to correct safety practices.

Keep on communicating. If possible and practical, send e-mail messages containing "Safety Tip of the Day/Week" are sent to your crew — and anyone else who might benefit.

Food for thought. "Climate" describes the feeling conveyed by the physical layout and the way in which members of an organization interact with each other and members of the public. How does the physical layout of your workplace make

a statement about your commitment to safety? Are safety concerns evident in the interaction among employees?

Lack of clarity about the issues surrounding safety and the consequences of accidents and injuries is often a barrier to workplace safety. The organization needs to clearly and consistently communicate performance expectations about safety.

Take time during one of your meetings to spell out goals and objectives in terms of reducing the cost and frequency of accidents and injuries. The potential cost of accidents and injuries need to be addressed as well.

Note: TalksZone safety meetings are not intended to take the place of your own safety procedures. Always consult and/or review your procedures before attempting any work.

