

# Substance abuse has huge costs

The abuse of alcohol or drugs can be devastating, both at work and at home. It costs billions of dollars every year in expenditures for health care, workplace injuries, disability payments, productivity losses and damaged property.

Anyone can have a substance abuse problem. Those under the influence of alcohol or drugs at work not only can be a risk to themselves but to every employee on site.

Taken to extreme, abuse can result in addiction, which is psychological and/or physical dependence on a substance.

Psychological dependence means an individual believes he or she cannot function in social, work or other settings without being intoxicated in some way. It is estimated that about 15 percent of regular substance users become psychologically dependent.

Physical dependence, on the other hand, includes one or both of the following experiences over time:

**Tolerance** — A need for increased amounts of a substance to achieve intoxication.

**Withdrawal** — Symptoms such as nausea, chills, and/or vomiting upon discontinuing use of the substance.

Here are some signs that may indicate you or a co-worker has a substance abuse problem:

- Frequently missing work or other appointments.
- Noticeable changes in job performance.



- Drinking alcohol in the morning.
- Feeling the need to take a drink or other drugs just to get through the day.
- Regularly being late for work or leaving early.
- Being short of money because it has been spent on alcohol or drugs.
- Needing more alcohol or other drugs than in the past.
- Not caring about personal appearance or cleanliness.
- Suddenly being very moody or short-tempered.

Most addiction sufferers hide their drug use from employers and co-workers, but there are some physical signs that suggest a problem. They include watery eyes, pin-point or dilated pupils, running nose, constant sniffing, tight lips, sores, ulcers, trembling, fatigue and irritability.

Some signs of substance abuse are similar to those caused by increased stress,

lack of sleep and physical or mental illness. Don't just assume someone has a substance abuse problem — but ignoring warning signs could worsen the problem if the person is indeed struggling.

If you see such signs then report them and help eliminate a serious risk — ignore the situation and it could be you who gets hurt.

Be honest with yourself if you think you might have a problem with alcohol or drugs (illegal or prescription).

If you are suspected of being under the influence at work you stand a good chance of losing your job. A reputation of having an alcohol or drug problem could make finding other employment difficult.

Here are some more things all workers can do to help deal with workplace substance abuse:

- Become familiar with the warning signs.
- Be aware of prescribed drugs as well as illegal drugs. Some medications, especially painkilling opioids, can seriously reduce the ability to work safely. If you are on prescribed drugs advise your site manager.
- Confine your drinking to social occasions where there is suitable recovery time, and don't accept drugs if they're offered.
- If you think you or a co-worker might have a problem, seek help through your employer or resources in the community.

# Drugs and Alcohol

## 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.

- 1 Only certain kinds of people can have a substance abuse problem.  
True      False
- 2 Can addiction to drugs or alcohol be psychological?  
Yes      No
- 3 Which of these can be experienced by someone who has a physical addiction to drugs or alcohol?  
A. Fear.  
B. Increased tolerance of the substance.  
C. Nervousness.  
D. Withdrawal.  
E. All of the above
- 4 Most addiction sufferers tend to hide the problem from their employers.  
True      False
- 5 Which of these can indicate that someone has a substance abuse problem?  
A. Noticeable changes in job performance.  
B. Regularly being late for work or leaving early.  
C. Not caring about personal appearance or cleanliness..  
D. Always being in a good mood.
- 6 Some signs of substance abuse are similar to those that have another cause.  
True      False
- 7 Which of these are ways to deal with drug or alcohol abuse in the workplace?  
A. Become familiar with the warning signs.  
B. If you are on prescribed drugs advise your supervisor or manager.  
C. If you think you or a co-worker might have a problem, seek help.  
D. All of the above.
- 8 Does your employer have a formal program to help substance abusers and their families?  
Yes      No      Don't Know

ANSWERS: 1. False, 2. Yes, 3. B. and D., 4. True, 5. A., B. and C., 6. True, 7. D., 8. Your answer



## Hold These Thoughts

Individuals and their families face numerous difficulties associated with problem drinking and drug use, and these problems often spill over into the workplace.

By encouraging and supporting treatment, employers can assist dramatically in reducing the negative impact of alcoholism and drug addiction in the workplace, while reducing their costs.

Establishment of an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) has been found to be very effective.

EAPs deal with all kinds of problems and provide short-term counseling, assessment and referral of employees with issues that include:

- Emotional and mental health.
- Marital and other family.
- Financial.
- Dependent care.
- Other personal problems that can affect the employee's work.

EAP service is confidential. These programs are usually staffed by professional counselors and may be operated in-house with agency personnel, under a contract with other agencies or EAP providers, or a combination of the two.

Additionally, employers can address substance use and abuse in their employee population by:

- Implementing drug-free workplace and other written substance abuse policies.
- Offering health benefits that provide comprehensive coverage for substance use disorders, including aftercare and counseling; reducing stigma in the workplace.
- Educating employees about the health and productivity hazards of substance abuse through company wellness programs.

Talks Zone — Inbox Safety Talks is published by Smart Workplace Inc. [www.smartworkplace.ca](http://www.smartworkplace.ca). All rights reserved ©. This Safety Talk is licensed to ONE supervisor and may be copied for use within his/her department only. No part of this publication is to be distributed without first obtaining the correct software license or written permission from the Publisher. Site licenses are available on request.

# Safety Meeting For the Record



Date of Meeting: \_\_\_\_\_

Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Department: \_\_\_\_\_

Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_ Finish Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Meeting Leader: \_\_\_\_\_

In Attendance:


## Tips for Safety Meeting Leaders

**Use visual aids effectively.** Three-by-Three is a good rule for Powerpoint presentations — three words, three lines per slide (you can go to a maximum of 6X6). The same holds true if you're still using overhead projectors. Always check that your audience can see, and avoid speaking while writing on the board or flipchart.

**Wait until you have everyone's attention** before speaking. Establish and maintain eye contact with your audience. Remember to give each and every participant or part of the room your attention. Eliminate distracting items on your

person, in your pockets, in your hands (avoid holding pens, jingling change, etc).

**Use positive body language.** Anchor yourself solidly on your feet and allow your arms to relax by your sides, thus avoiding a 'closed' posture (crossed arms, etc.). Show non-threatening hand movements – open palms or the steeple gesture — when appropriate. Tilt your head when listening to responses, otherwise keep it straight to indicate authority. Move purposefully towards the audience to show interest in their responses.

***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.*