

Working Under the Influence

Introduction:

Workplace accidents increase significantly when employees are under the influence of any type of substance. When an employee comes to work under the influence, it's a safety concern for all employees. Drugs and alcohol can affect the workers' ability to work safely. Substance abuse can impair decision-making abilities, affect coordination, decrease reaction times, distort vision, and increase the number of accidents.

Discussion Points:

- Substance abuse can affect the worker's ability to work safely
- Substance abuse by an employee can have a substantial impact on productivity
- Companies should develop a Substance Abuse Policy
- Communicate the Substance Abuse Policy through training and safety meetings
- Provide supervisors with the tools to recognize the signs of impairment

Discussion:

Substance abuse by an employee is not only personal it can also have a substantial impact on the morale and productivity of all workers and pose a risk to both the abuser and his or her co-workers. According to the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence Inc. (NCADD), 20% of all workers and supervisors across a wide range of industries report that a co-worker's drinking jeopardized their own productivity and safety.

A worker must not enter or remain at the workplace while his or her ability to work is affected by any substance. If the employee is required to perform safety-sensitive duties such as driving vehicles, using heavy equipment, or working around machinery, he or she must be restricted from performing these job tasks if the use of any substance is suspected. If there is reason to believe a co-worker is abusing drugs or alcohol, alert the supervisor immediately, do not wait for someone to get injured before taking action. If the worker is disruptive, remove him or her from the worksite immediately. If the employee physically resists, the situation should be handled by company security or local police.

Substance abuse is costly for the employer. According to NCADD, the cost of drug abuse is over \$81 billion annually. Companies should develop a Substance Abuse Policy. Implementing the company's Substance Abuse Program provides a safe environment. In a company where the safety risk is high, a zero-tolerance policy may be necessary. It's possible for some companies to opt for a more lenient approach if there is a low level of risk. The Substance Abuse Policy must be communicated to all employees through training and followed up with safety meetings. Provide supervisors with the tools to recognize the signs of impairment and the knowledge to deal with these situations appropriately. Supervisors should be able to recognize the signs of substance use and intervene quickly. An intoxicated employee must be handled as privately as possible and according to state and federal laws.

As always, stay safe out there!



March 21, 2022