



Organisations – large or small, private or public sector – can expect to have to tackle problems relating to drug and alcohol misuse amongst employees at some time. The annual cost to industry of drug misuse has been estimated at £800 million, and that of alcohol misuse at £3.3 billion. Problems caused by drug and alcohol misuse not only affect the health, safety and welfare of staff but also business continuity and financial stability.

All managers have a duty of care to their employees. Drug and alcohol misuse can not only destroy the individual concerned, but can also have an extremely detrimental effect on the wider workforce, clients and customers and the organisation's performance. Organisations must be aware of the potential problem and be confident that they have the background knowledge and policies in place to deal with individual cases.

**The object should be to drive drugs and alcohol, not people, out of the organisation. Prevention is as important as dealing with the consequences of misuse.**

Drug and alcohol misuse should be seen as a health problem and the employee should be supported as far as possible, with disciplinary action being used only as a last resort.

**There is evidence that the most effective way of achieving this is to introduce and maintain a comprehensive, unequivocal and effective drugs and alcohol policy, established at the top and known throughout the organization.**

Managers should therefore ask themselves the following questions:

- Does my organisation have a drugs & alcohol policy?
- If not, why not?
- If yes, how effective is it?
- What are the legal implications?
- How accessible is it to employees?

**According to research conducted in 2002 by the Chartered Management Institute, one in five managers believe that alcohol misuse has increased in their organisation over the past few years while 16 per cent feel that drugs misuse has increased. However, while the signs of alcohol misuse are familiar to most (85 per cent) a large proportion of managers (46 per cent) are not confident they would recognise the signs of drug misuse. Effective, specialised training will address this and equip the manager effectively.**

## Business Impact

Problems that can arise where employees are misusing substances can include:

- Lower productivity
- Increased accident rates and associated claims
- Increased staff turnover
- Lower profit margins
- Increased absenteeism
- Loss of clients
- Damage to the organisation's reputation

Legal and Human Rights Issues:

**Over half of managers (55 per cent) agree that random drug and alcohol testing in the workplace is an effective deterrent.**

**The Guardian reported (July 2004) that 75% of employees interviewed would prefer to work for a company that operated a robust Drugs and Alcohol Policy.**

Inevitably legal and human rights issues come into play. An organisation could find itself in breach of employment and/or human rights law if an employee is dismissed for misusing drugs or alcohol when there is no stated policy that this may be the outcome. It is therefore essential that all employees are made aware at the outset of the existence of such policies, how they operate and their full implications.

Legally, employers can only seek evidence of impairment whilst in the workplace and for this to be effective, an employee would need to be tested immediately if impairment is suspected, and subsequently suspended on full pay, if appropriate, until the test results are known.

Unless justified on safety grounds, testing procedures to identify drug or alcohol misuse should only be introduced with the consent of employees. For testing in the workplace (random or otherwise) to be accepted, it is imperative that it is set out within the organisation's policy. This must detail how testing will be carried out and under what circumstances, and what will happen if a test proves positive. Any policy should detail the employer's right of search as well as rights concerning the retention of confidential information.

Any testing and the interpretation of test results must be carried out under the direction of qualified personnel, experienced in the field, to ensure the highest quality procedures are used. Information that is revealed as a result of the tests which has no bearing on the ability of the employee to work safely, should not be recorded.

All testing should aim to be as non-invasive as possible and only be sufficient to establish whether or not the person is or is not under the influence of drugs or alcohol. The tests used must be capable of showing real evidence of impairment sufficient to put at risk the safety of others.



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