



WorkCare SourcePaper

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Developing a Drug Free Work Environment and Fostering Employee Wellness

An important productivity program which deserves ongoing consideration is the development of a Drug Free Workplace.

Since commencement of the Drug Free Workplace Act of 1988, many employers have instituted workplace drug testing programs. However, many employers have not.

Research statistics suggest that as many as 5-10% of the workforce abuses drugs. While there are different levels of abuse across different industries, no single employer group is immune from the effects of drug abuse.

Why is drug abuse such an important issue for employers?

Employees who abuse drugs can:

- Place the health and safety of employees, customers and the public at risk.
- Subject employer assets and trade secrets to theft and destruction.
- Damage product quality, company integrity and reputation.
- Subject the company to exposure from liability lawsuits and loss of contracts which require compliance with drug free workplace requirements.

Effects on the Hiring Pool

Employers who do not drug test may attract applicants from a pool of drug abusers who cannot apply where drug testing is performed. As a result, employers who do not drug test may be faced with hiring a higher percentage of applicants who have a substance abuse problem.

What are some of the issues regarding a drug-tolerant work environment?

Safety Issues:

- Impaired employee functioning
- Increased accidents and workers' compensation claims

Employee Morale:

- Higher Turnover, Lower Work Quality, Reduced Team Effort

Security:

- Theft, Law Enforcement Involvement

Organizational Image and Community Relations:

- Accidents, lawsuits, adverse media attention
- Reduced trust and confidence
- Reduced ability to attract high quality employees

What are some patterns and results of substance abuse often seen in the workplace?

Absenteeism, such as...

- Excessive sick leave
- Monday and/or Friday absences
- Repeated absences, whether 1-2 days, or 1-2 weeks
- Excessive tardiness, especially on Monday mornings or after a lunch break
- Leaving work early
- Increased improbable excuses for absences
- High incidence of colds, flu, gastrointestinal complaints
- Frequent unscheduled short term absences (with or without medical explanation)

"On the Job" Absenteeism, including...

- Continued absence from the workstation more than the job requires
- Numerous breaks and trips to restroom, water fountain, etc.
- Repeated physical illness on the job

High Accident Rate and Accident claims for...

- Excessive accidents on the job
- Accidents off the job that affect on-the-job performance

Behavioral patterns as just described may not necessarily be due exclusively to substance abuse. Employees may be juggling multiple personal and family issues, resulting in decreased work productivity, illness, and emotional stress.

Rather than focus exclusively on substance abuse as a potential cause, employers should take a broader look at performance issues at their company.



Syed Z. Hussain, MD, WorkCare Medical Director and Medical Review Officer, provides expert guidance in the development and management of corporate substance abuse testing programs. Call Dr. Hussain at 203-371-4445 for information on how to implement or improve upon an existing corporate drug testing program.

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What can Employers Do to Provide for a Safe and Productive Work Environment?

Seek to understand the range of personal issues which affect all employees:

- Running of a Household
- Financial Issues
- Child and Adult Daycare
- Family and Relationship Issues
- Personal Medical/ Lifestyle
- Stress
- Job Performance

Foster an Environment Which Promotes Wellness and a Healthy Lifestyle

- Review your company's benefits plan design and provide incentives for healthy behaviors
- Sponsor or provide worksite screenings
- Publicize Wellness Success Stories
- Institute a Drug Free Workplace

Institute Employee Drug Awareness Education

Drug awareness education can provide an enormous service to your employees, not only by helping them confront and address personal substance abuse issues, but also to confront family member issues regarding substance abuse. Remember, employees bring their problems to work, and to the extent that employers can help minimize those problems, everybody benefits.

Institute Supervisory Training

A previously stated, employee performance and behavioral problems may not be due exclusively to substance abuse. Supervisory training teaches managers and supervisors how to recognize, document, and address performance problems, whatever the cause. A neutral approach is safest as it does not make assumptions which may turn out to be false. Supervisory training also provides information regarding assistance, accountability and ongoing monitoring.

Offer an EAP or Provide a Source for Community EAP Services

Employee Assistance Programs are an important resource for employees who can benefit from guidance, counseling, and intervention for personal, family, and emotional issues. An EAP may be a component of an employer's benefits package, and alternatively, employers can provide a list of community resources for employees to utilize on their own.

When Instituting a Corporate Drug Testing Program:

Develop a clearly written policy which states that substance abuse at the workplace will not be tolerated, describes the scope of the policy, and consequences for violating the policy.

- Partner with a qualified testing services provider
- Institute screening fairly and equitably
- Use care in selecting the testing panel
- Assist employees in seeking help prior to program commencement
- Include a requirement to test in any employment ads
- Distribute EAP resource information to employees

Certain Occupations Require that Testing is Performed. Examples Include:

- Operators of school buses, public transportation vehicles, large trucks.
- Use of vehicles which transport hazardous substances.
- Occupations deemed safety sensitive

For additional information and program assistance, contact Mercedes Curina, Business Manager, St. Vincent's Immediate Health Care Center at **203-337-3434**. Our team of dedicated occupational health professionals can provide expert guidance in the development of effective employee healthcare programs for your company.

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