



# Drugs and Alcohol in the Workplace – Guidance for Managers

## Business Impact

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

- Lower productivity
- Increased staff turnover
- Lower profit margins
- Increased absenteeism
- Loss of clients
- Damage to the organisation's reputation
- Accidents and other breaches of health and safety requirements
- Employee theft
- Lower staff morale
- Workplace bullying
- Increased stress levels

## 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.*

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, the employee would need to be tested immediately if impairment was suspected, and subsequently suspended on full pay, if appropriate, until the test results were 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 medically qualified personnel, experienced in the field, to ensure the highest quality procedures are used. Information which 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.

## Auditing Procedures

*Only 13 per cent of those managers surveyed whose organisations have drug and alcohol policies, can confidently state that there is also an audit procedure in place.*

A drugs policy will only be effective if audited on a regular basis. The staff entrusted with implementing the policy must be properly trained and their knowledge and ability to apply the procedures kept up-to-date.

Key performance indicators must be established and organisations be prepared to learn from the regular audits, making changes and improvements where necessary.

Procedures of this nature can occupy a significant amount of time and line managers who are given the responsibility of overseeing them should be prepared to build that time into their schedules. This in turn will require the support and involvement of senior management.

Training is of vital importance. It is essential that all employees fully understand the policy of their organisation and that they sign off on that training to ensure that no gaps occur.

## Implementing a Drugs and Alcohol Policy

A drugs and alcohol policy must be:

- D**eliverable
- R**ecognisable
- U**nderstandable
- G**uiding
- S**traightforward

It is also important that the policy is accessible, actionable and transparent so that all employees are clear about it, and its implications.

## Drafting the Policy

*Less than half of all managers surveyed have a drugs, alcohol or combined policy in place in their organisation.*

- A senior manager must be mandated to oversee the development of the policy
- All staff/union and safety representatives (where appropriate) must be involved throughout the procedure
- Feedback from staff must be sought at appropriate stages
- The final draft of the policy must be approved and endorsed by the Chief Executive or equivalent

## Implementation and Communication

*Of those managers surveyed whose organisations did have a policy in place, 22 per cent admitted not knowing what the policy involved.*

- Senior management must be involved in the implementation, communication and maintenance of the policy
- A strict timetable must be set for implementation
- Details of the policy and the date it becomes effective must be communicated to all employees

Channels of communication include:

- Interviewing process
- Induction programme
- Staff handbook
- Intranet
- Email bulletins
- Posters
- Leaflets
- Information and training seminars

## Training

*Less than a third of the organisations with a drugs or alcohol policy in place provide education on the consequences of drug or alcohol misuse.*

- Awareness training for all managers must be provided to cover:
  - Contents of the policy
  - Legal implications
  - Signs and symptoms of misuse
  - Methods of testing
  - Dealing with the consequences of misuse
- Managers themselves could be tested at the time of training in order to experience the testing and encourage buy-in throughout the workplace
- New employees must be informed of the policy on being offered employment and training given as part of the induction programme

## Auditing

*Only 13 per cent of organisations with a policy include an audit procedure.*

It is important to ensure that there is a robust method in place to measure compliance with the policy.

- A senior manager must take responsibility for overseeing the auditing process
- A regular review should be made of all documented arrangements, training records etc.
- It should be carried out by a trained auditor