

Behavioral Health: Developing A Better Understanding

A HEALTHY AND DRUG-FREE WORKFORCE

Alcohol and drug abuse is widespread within our society. It affects many of our industries in many different ways. Although national, state, and local efforts have shown encouraging results in detecting employees under the influence, the problem of alcohol and drug abuse in the workplace remains to be a serious issue. No workplace is immune. According to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 74.9 percent of all adult illicit drug users are employed full or part time. Most binge and heavy alcohol users are also employed full or part time.

To establish a drug-free workforce in Ohio, collaborative efforts must be taken to build relationships that foster safer, drug-free, and healthy workplaces that protect employees' health and safety. These efforts include not just training and education programs regarding the effects of workplace alcohol and drug abuse, but efforts to provide access to employee assistance programs that are capable of providing expert assessment of employees personal concerns; referrals of employees for appropriate diagnosis, treatment, and assistance; and follow-up services for employees who participate in the program or require monitoring after returning to work.



What is a Drug-Free Workplace?

The “Drug-Free Workplace” initiative was introduced by the Federal government for its employees by President Ronald Reagan in 1986 and circulated into the private sector by the Drug Advisory Council. A comprehensive approach to having a drug-free workplace program would include:

- Supervisor Training
- Access to Assistance
- A Written Policy
- Employee Education
- Drug Testing

Supported by public opinion, legislation and regulation of safety-sensitive industries in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the drug-free workplace concept was adopted and promoted by national, state, and local organizations of employers and business executives. Some unions adopted it as well and undertook drug testing of their members and provided “Drug-Free worker” identification. Written policies helped assure that all employees had the same understanding of their rights and responsibilities under the program, and that employers administer the program uniformly among all employees.

Did You Know...

While alcohol and drug abuse may seem like an issue that lies outside of work, these problems cost American companies. According to SAMHSA, businesses lose around \$81 billion due to lost productivity in just one year. These costs are associated with absenteeism and decreased productivity as well as with increased worker's compensation costs, increased rates for disability coverage and employee theft. Substance abusers also change jobs more frequently, and the cost of replacing and training employees adds to the financial burden.

Implementing a Drug-Free Workplace Program

In order to implement a comprehensive Drug-Free Workplace Program, five components are required: a written policy, employee education, supervisor training, drug testing, and access to assistance. Each component improves the safety and health in the workplace through deterring, detecting and taking corrective action against alcohol and drug use that affects the workplace. The five components are expounded upon below:

A Written Policy: All Drug-Free Workplace Programs must start with the development of a written alcohol and drug use policy, which is the critical document for implementing your program. A written substance policy should entail full and fair disclosure that should cover every important aspect of the program you are implementing. This should include outlining the responsibilities of the employer and employees.

Employee Education: Employers are responsible for developing an employee education component which is intended to provide all employees with information about the employer's Drug Free Workplace Program and how it operates. Employees should be informed about the specifics of the employer's policy which should reflect the requirements for the particular program being implemented. Since the intent is to communicate about the program, each employee should be given a hard copy of the written policy and acknowledge receipt.

Supervisor Training: Employers are responsible for developing supervisor training that is designed to provide skill building for all supervisors in terms of their responsibilities for supporting the program. Supervisors need to be trained about the impact of alcohol and drugs on the workplace; their responsibilities in relationship to the program, policy and procedures; how to recognize, document and confront a possible alcohol and drug use problem; and how to initiate reasonable suspicion testing. Supervisors are the link to the employer's workforce and they are the key to the successful implementation of Drug-Free Workplace policies.

Drug Testing: At the heart of every Drug-Free Workplace Program is alcohol and drug use testing. In implementing any level of the Drug-Free Workplace Program, an employer is responsible for developing testing that is intended to detect and deter alcohol and drug use in the workplace. The employer's written Drug-Free Workplace policy must clearly spell out all aspects of how drug and alcohol testing will be conducted, sharing the meaning of having specified cut-off levels for each tested drug and alcohol, and the procedures or protocols that define the testing process. It is important to note that if an employer has a drug testing policy, the following drug and alcohol testing periods should be implemented:

- Pre-employment and/or new hire
- Reasonable suspicion
- Post accident
- Follow-up to assessment or treatment
- Random

Access to Assistance: Employee assistance programs (EAP) are a cornerstone of any drug-free program. Offering help to employees is a way of showing them they are a valued company resource. For some employers, employee assistance may be a new concept. Taking proactive steps to provide employees with help to resolve personal problems including alcohol and drug use before these problems impact job performance, saves money, builds loyalty, and prevents problems that may affect workplace safety. To learn more about the local community network of service providers, you can call your local Alcohol, Drug Addiction, and Mental Health (ADAMH) Board. A Board directory is available online on the Ohio Association of County Behavioral Health Authorities website at www.oacbha.org. Saving an employee through providing quality employee assistance services does not just save an employer's money in terms of preserving their investment in the employee, it also has a positive effect on the person's family and their ability to achieve recovery.

Sources:

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism
National Survey on Drug Use and Health

Ohio Bureau of Worker's Compensation
SAMHSA