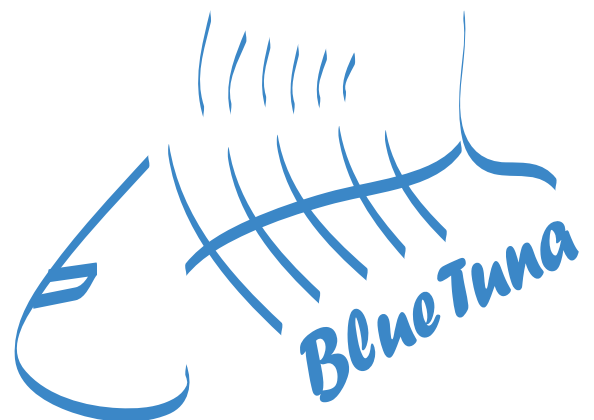


**Drug abuse is a major
problem in our
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**It's also a special
problem at work.**

**DRUG ABUSE
INTRODUCTION**



Introduction

Introduction/Overview

Drug abuse is a major problem in our country. It's also a special problem at work. People who work under the influence of drugs put an unacceptable burden on their employers and co-workers. Though users may not be aware of it, drugs have the effect of reducing their physical and mental abilities. Sometimes drugs actually make users feel they're smarter, stronger, or more on top of things than ever. That can create serious safety risks for the drug users and those around them.

Safety is our concern today, but drug abusers can cause other workplace problems. Studies repeatedly show that drug abusers are, on average, less productive and cost more in health benefits and sick days than other workers. Drug use costs their employers money and creates more work and worries for other employees.

Facts

Here are a few statistics that emphasize why this organization does not permit using illegal drugs at work—or working under their influence.

- 73 percent of all current drug users aged 18 or older, or 8.3 million adults, were employed, according to a 1997 U.S. government survey.
- More than 60 percent of adults know people who have gone to work under the influence of drugs or alcohol, according to a Hazelden Foundation survey.
- Employees who use drugs are 3.6 times more likely than other employees to be involved in a workplace accident, 2.2 times more likely to ask to leave early or take time off, 2.5 times more likely to have absences of eight days or more, and 3 times more likely to be late for work.
- Drug use at work costs U.S. businesses between \$75 and \$100 billion a year in accidents, lost time, and higher health care and workers' compensation costs, according to U.S. Labor Department estimates.



Marijuana

Identifying Drugs

Drugs are hazardous, sometimes even fatal, to users' health. But workplace safety is our concern today. If you've been around drug users, or even tried drugs yourself, you can probably understand why we can't depend on a drug user's coordination, reflexes, or judgment to assure safety or performance on the job.

Marijuana is a commonly-used drug that presents real dangers on the job. It slows down physical and mental processes. It interferes with judgment of time, space, and distance. It reduces short-term memory and the ability to concentrate; users often lose track of what they were doing or why.

Do you want someone who's been smoking marijuana driving a forklift, inspecting equipment, looking out for the safety of people in confined spaces, or working on an elevated platform? Think about this person trying to make careful decisions, follow safety rules, or even remember what those rules were. That's why marijuana is a major safety hazard.

Heroin and other opiates, including prescription drugs like codeine, cause drowsiness and even a kind of stupor. Heroin is also highly addictive, so that as time passes a user generally needs more of it to get the same effect. By the way, heroin has these effects no matter how you use it. Some people think they're okay as long as they don't inject it with a needle. Needles add to the risk, as sharing them can spread the viruses that cause AIDS and hepatitis. But all heroin use is dangerous.



Heroin comes in various colors dependant upon purity and country of origin.

Identifying Drugs

Some people also convince themselves that anything available by prescription is safe. While there may be good medical reasons to use medicines that contain codeine, they're not safe to use at work. It's pretty hard to think, react, or function properly on these drugs.

Cocaine, crack, and its other variants have the opposite effect. They get you so wired up that you think you can do anything. Cocaine also makes it hard to concentrate, may cause confusion, and generally impairs judgment and decision-making. Cocaine confidence is based on the drug, not reality. And that makes it dangerous.



Crack Cocaine



Cocaine Powder



LSD Blotter Paper

Hallucinogens like LSD, PCP, Ecstasy, and other designer drugs are dangerous, too. Some may be legal, but that's only because the law hasn't caught up with them yet. These drugs can cause not just hallucinations, but confusion, fear and paranoia, sometimes violent behavior, and other frightening effects. Seeing things that aren't there is surely a safety hazard on the job—or off it.

Sniffing glue and solvents is popular among kids and some adults, too. However, these drugs can cause hallucinations, dizziness, and other hazardous distractions from reality. In the worst cases, they can be fatal.

Identifying Drugs

Amphetamines, or “speed,” are another category of dangerous drugs. They’re stimulants, like cocaine, and people take them to stay awake and alert when they have to work, drive, study, or complete other tasks. Unfortunately, the drugs tend to create so much excess energy that they interfere with concentration and make it hard to focus. And since speed is often made by amateurs in basement labs, there’s no way to know just what the drug ingredients are.



Various forms of Amphetamines



The “down” drugs like barbiturates, tranquilizers, and pain killers are amphetamines’ opposite. Even when prescribed for pain, sleep, or other problems, they may be a danger at work. They cause drowsiness and slow down reflexes and actions. If you’re concerned that your prescription medicine might interfere with your judgment and safety at work, let me know so we can be sure you’re performing tasks that won’t create problems or even dangers.

Regulations

Regulations

Most of the drugs we've been discussing are illegal. In other words, it's illegal to possess them—even if you're not working under their influence. In addition, the federal Drug-Free Workplace Act says any firm with a federal government contract of \$25,000 or more must have and follow written drug-free workplace policies and certify in writing that their workplace is indeed drug free. The act has a variety of requirements, including the loss of government business for violations.

Federal rules are even more strict for transportation employers and firms that receive defense-related government contracts. I won't go into all the requirements today. I will just underline that this is a drug-free workplace, and we take that commitment seriously.

Identifying Hazards

Surveys indicate that many people are aware that their co-workers work under the influence of drugs. Yet few employees report concerns that a colleague may be putting lives at risk.

We all have a responsibility to look out for and report possible drug abuse. That doesn't mean becoming police officers or drug abuse counselors. It means we have to protect ourselves by being alert to performance and behavior problems that could indicate drug abuse—especially when a person displays many of these signs and/or the symptoms represent a change in performance or behavior.

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You might pay closer attention to an employee who repeatedly:

- Has accidents or near-misses
- Ignores safety rules and procedures
- Takes unnecessary risks
- Is careless
- Makes mistakes
- Produces work of uneven quality
- Is less productive than others or than in the past
- Has difficulty concentrating
- Shows poor judgment
- Is absent, arrives late, leaves early, and takes long lunches
- Is missing from the job site without explanation

Other symptoms linked to personal behavior and attitudes include:

- Avoiding co-workers and friends
- Blaming others for problems
- Complaining about financial or personal problems
- Taking less care with grooming, dress, and hygiene
- Mood swings

All these symptoms can, and often do, have causes unrelated to drugs. But most of them do indicate some type of problem that could create risks on the job. And ignoring these problems is a mistake. Whatever the cause, we don't want to people to think they're functioning well when they're not. And we don't want to put ourselves or others at risk because we're uncomfortable drawing attention to poor performance or unsettling behavior.

Protect Against Hazards

Protection Against Hazards

Look at these situations the same way you would any safety hazard. We must act to correct any potential hazard, whether it's a spill on the floor, a toxic substance in the air, or a worker made careless or oblivious by drugs or other problems.

If you feel close to a person who is showing troubling symptoms, you may want to express your concerns directly. Don't accuse and don't bring up drugs!! Identify what concerns you (for instance, repeated near-misses, increase in absences, change in attitude). Explain that you're worried about the person and about the possible safety risks on the job. Suggest that the person seek help with whatever the problem may be.

If you don't want to get directly involved, I encourage you to confide your behavior or safety concerns to me. You'll notice I use the word "confide." Drug abuse is a personal problem that needs proper treatment. It shouldn't be the subject of gossip and accusations.

If you come to me, or I have such concerns myself, I would:

- Talk with the person privately
- Explain the specific actions or behavior that are causing concern
- Document the concerns where possible (e.g., records of absences and late arrivals, accidents and near misses)
- Emphasize that my concerns are with safety and performance, not anyone's personal life
- Clarify what performance and safety levels are expected
- Point out policies that may relate to the discussion (e.g., absenteeism, warnings, etc.)

Finally, I would provide the person with information on how to get help through this organization or elsewhere in the community. I would emphasize that there are many forms of help available for all types of problems, from drugs to alcohol, to family issues, to physical and mental health concerns. There's assistance available to anyone who wants to take advantage of it with varied options such as:

- Individual counseling sessions
- Counseling and discussion groups
- Support groups composed of people who share a problem
- Treatment facilities for short- or long-term residency

Look in the Mirror

So far today, I've talked about what to do if your co-worker has, or may have, a drug problem. But the fact is that sometimes the person with the problem may be you. If you've been using drugs and believe these concerns don't apply to you, you're wrong. In fact, drug abusers typically deny there's a problem.

Drugs are unhealthy, and using drugs to feel better or handle problems ultimately causes more problems. However, my real concern is that a person who uses drugs is less productive and more dangerous on the job. Maybe you've been lucky so far and nothing serious has happened. Or maybe no one has yet confronted you about your erratic performance, poor judgment, defensive attitudes, or other clues to a problem.



But drugs are a problem, for users and for the rest of us. Men and women of every age, job background, and income can fall into the trap. When you “need” a drug to relax, feel good, handle problems, or just function, you have a drug problem. If you can admit that, you're on your way to overcoming it.

There's plenty of help available for anyone who wants to end a drug abuse problem. (Note: If your organization has an employee assistance plan or similar program, explain it now. Describe services available, how to access them, and the confidential nature of inquiries and treatments.)

If you're comfortable with your doctor or clergyman, you may want to discuss options with that person. You may want to call the local information hotline to discuss programs available locally, or just pick up the phone book and look under “Drugs” in the White or Yellow Pages. You may be surprised at how many choices you have—which gives you an idea of how common these problems are.

It takes courage to face up to drug problems and to seek help. But once you do, you'll find that there is help out there. When someone takes action to deal with a drug problem, the rest of us have a role to play, too. Anyone who takes that step needs and deserves help and support.

Wrap Up

Wrap-up

Drug abuse is a problem found everywhere in our society. It's not just a problem for the drug abuser. It affects that person's family, friends, and co-workers. In many cases, the drug abuser's reduced physical and/or mental abilities can affect many other people, too. That's why we have a zero tolerance policy regarding drugs here.

If you have a problem, we want you to do something about it.

If you spot a problem, we want you to report it.

We can't afford to take a chance that any employee's reduced capacity, confusion, or other effects of drug use will put others at risk.

If you have a problem you may begin by talking with someone you trust. Check into your company benefits for a program or counseling.

<http://www.na.org/> Checkout this site.

