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DRUG TESTING

Alcohol and other drug abuse adversely affects job performance and attendance and increases workplace accidents. It also limits and ruins careers.

Among tools available to employers to combat this problem are drug testing programs. Drug tests help employers (1) increase safety, (2) improve productivity, and (3) retain valuable employees. The Drug-Free Workplace Act of 1988 requires many employers working under federal contracts and grants to establish policies regarding drug use at work and to notify employees about the policies. Federal guidelines for drug tests have made drug testing a reality in jobs involving public safety or national security.

Drug tests may be conducted at the following times: before employment, randomly, after an accident, for reasonable cause, and after treatment. An employee drug test generally follows a four-step procedure: the employee signs a form which states that the test is understood and authorized, a urine and/or blood sample is given, the sample is labeled and sealed to prevent tampering, and the final results are reviewed by someone with special training. The test results are confidential. Secure procedures of handling and transporting the test samples are established through the entire process.

▶ STATISTICS ON WORKPLACE SUBSTANCE ABUSE & DRUG TESTING

- In 2003, almost 77% (14.9 million) of the adults who suffered from substance use disorders were employed.¹
- Addiction is the most common problem for employees in most workplaces, accounting for 20% of voluntary employee assistance referrals to treatment and 50% of supervisory referrals.¹
- Drug users consume almost twice the benefits as nonusers, are absent 50% more often, and make more than twice as many workers' compensation claims.²
- The Department of Labor estimates that substance abuse costs U. S. businesses more than \$100 billion each year due to lost productivity, absenteeism, theft, accidents, and additional health-care costs.²

What Co-workers Can Do

Alcoholism and drug dependency are treatable chronic diseases that know no hierarchy. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), 20 million Americans, or 11.3% of the population, are affected.

When a colleague shows signs of abusing alcohol or drugs, it can be difficult to know what to do or say. But, if a co-worker's alcohol or drug use affects either your work or his or her health, it's important you try to help. In fact, this may be the time your colleague needs you most.

Following are some suggestions developed by Hazelden counselors to help you broach the subject with your colleague.³

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- Make use of company resources to help you assist your co-worker, especially if he or she resists your efforts. Denial is a common reaction among those who are dependent on alcohol or drugs.
- Wait to talk to your colleague when he or she is sober and clearheaded.
- Consider writing down what you want to say and practice how you'd answer a variety of responses from your colleague. This will make your discussion easier.
- Express your concern in an honest and caring way. Be sure to use "I" phrases such as "I'm worried." This way, your colleague can't argue with your feelings.
- Talk to your co-worker about the effect of alcohol or drugs on whatever he or she cares about most: career, family, etc. Even if your co-worker doesn't care for himself, he may get help for the sake of his family.
- Don't blame or criticize your colleague for his or her behavior. Addiction is a medically proven disease and often causes individuals to act in ways that are not normal for them.³

Helpful Resources

- Center for Substance Abuse Prevention
- Employee Assistance Professional Association
- Institute for a Drug-Free Workplace
- National Clearinghouse for Alcohol & Drug Information
- National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependency
- National Institute for Alcohol Abuse & Alcoholism
- National Institute on Drug Abuse³

1 2004 Dorothy K. Blum, V.P. of Employee Assistance Professionals Association

2 2005 U. S. Center for Substance Abuse Prevention

3 2006 Hazelden Foundation, *Talking About Alcohol/Drugs in the Workplace*

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Resource from NCADA's RADAR library. For more information visit our website at www.ncada-stl.org.
For questions on substance use, abuse and related problems, call NCADA's Help Line at (314) 962-3456.