

ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS IN THE WORKPLACE

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

Abusing alcohol and other drugs may damage your physical and mental health; being under their influence in the workplace, however, can lead to serious injuries – to yourself and others.

The risks come from the effects that alcohol and other drugs (including medicines) can have on your behaviour. For example, if you are drowsy or your coordination is affected, it would be dangerous for you to drive a vehicle or operate machinery.

Similarly, if someone else at your workplace is under the influence of alcohol or other drugs, it can put you and your workmates at risk.

If you are affected by alcohol or other drugs and are injured at work, you may not be able to get workers compensation.

If you possess, consume, distribute or sell illegal drugs (including cigarettes or alcohol where a person is under age) in the workplace, you can be prosecuted.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS?

Some symptoms of drugs and alcohol use include:

- blurred vision
- slurred speech
- dizziness
- drowsiness and falling asleep at work
- extreme emotional highs and lows
- hangovers – including headaches, shaking, vomiting and nausea
- lack of co-ordination or poor reflexes
- sudden violent or aggressive behaviour
- lack of inhibition, judgement or self control.

Some other signs that may indicate someone is under the influence are:

- 'near miss' incidents
- frequent absences or lateness
- self-neglect
- interpersonal problems.

Bear in mind that there can be other explanations for all these signs.

WHAT SHOULD I DO?

Ensure that you are not under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs at work.

If you are taking medicine, check with your doctor or pharmacist about what possible effects – for example drowsiness – the medicine may have on you. If appropriate, discuss these effects with your manager – you may need to be put on restricted duties while you are taking the medication.

Look out for your workmates. If you suspect someone is under the influence of alcohol or other drugs at work, report your concerns to your manager or occupational health and safety (OHS) representative. Do not approach the person directly unless it is to prevent an immediate risk.

Remember that signs of possible drug or alcohol abuse may be due to other reasons, such as health issues, and actual abuse may be the result of matters like bullying or relationship problems. Do not jump to conclusions.

If you report suspected alcohol or other drugs abuse, do not feel that you have ‘dobbed in a mate’; you are looking out for them and everyone else at work. Covering for them would put everyone at risk.

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

For guidance on developing an alcohol and other drugs policy for your workplace, read WorkCover’s publication *Alcohol and other drugs in the workplace* (Catalogue No. WC01359).

Your employer should have risk assessments that address the risks of alcohol and other drugs at your workplace. If they do not have a written risk assessment, get them to contact WorkCover for guidance.

If you are worried about reporting alcohol or other drugs abuse in the workplace to your manager or safety representative, or if you do not get an appropriate response from them, you can contact WorkCover directly on **13 10 50** or through contact@workcover.nsw.gov.au. You can remain anonymous if you wish.

A WorkCover inspector or a business advisory officer can attend your workplace and provide guidance and advice in relation to your concerns. They can also help your employer to develop an alcohol and other drugs policy for your workplace.

Disclaimer

This publication may contain occupational health and safety and workers compensation information. It may include some of your obligations under the various legislations that WorkCover NSW administers. To ensure you comply with your legal obligations you must refer to the appropriate legislation.

Information on the latest laws can be checked by visiting the NSW legislation website (www.legislation.nsw.gov.au).

This publication does not represent a comprehensive statement of the law as it applies to particular problems or to individuals or as a substitute for legal advice. You should seek independent legal advice if you need assistance on the application of the law to your situation.

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