

Safety Talks!

HANDOUT

Workplace Alcohol & Drug Abuse ■ T1603-03

Be Straight and Sober for Work

Behind the wheel, behind the desk, or on the shop floor, substance abuse can kill. For example, a construction worker who was impaired by alcohol fell to his death through a floor opening.

Many jobs require alertness, accuracy and quick reflexes. When something interferes with those abilities, the results can be devastating.

Substance abuse can significantly hamper a person's performance. So why do people abuse alcohol and drugs? There are many reasons. Job-related factors can include:

- High stress
- Low satisfaction
- Long hours or irregular shifts
- Fatigue
- Repetitive duties
- Periods of boredom
- Isolation
- Remote or irregular supervision

The aftereffects of substance abuse can also diminish job performance. Preoccupation with the habit can interfere with attention to the job. There's also the possibility of illegal activity with the sale of illicit drugs to other employees.

Substance abuse causes higher accident, fatality and absenteeism rates, in addition to loss of production, faulty decision-making and poor morale.

To deal with their problem, abusers must acknowledge the problem exists,

and be willing to do something about it. Some companies might respond simply by firing the abuser, while others are more willing to help troubled employees, either directly or through referral to community services.

Employees aren't doing anyone any favors by ignoring co-workers who are impaired by alcohol or drugs. Compare that to ignoring a defective tool or piece of equipment; most workers would report that immediately.

But very often when someone is suspected of drinking or doing drugs at the wrong time, in the wrong place, nothing is said. The silence is often due to our desire to avoid conflict or difficulty with someone we work with.

Who picks up the slack for this person and runs the risk of injury or death because he or she can't function properly? Co-workers do.

You have a responsibility to talk to your supervisor about anything that affects the safe performance of your job. It can be tough, but if you honestly believe a certain individual has a drug or alcohol problem, report it. Your actions may help the employee beat a terrible addiction. More importantly, your actions could save his or her life.

Do everyone a favor, especially the substance abuser. Report such incidents and situations before someone else is harmed.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. Substance abuse will not interfere with work if you control the amount you take.
☐ True ☐ False
2. People have many reasons for abusing substances, including addiction.
☐ True ☐ False
3. Substance abuse causes higher absenteeism rates.
☐ True ☐ False
4. Other employees can also suffer consequences from a co-worker's substance abuse.
☐ True ☐ False
5. Telling a supervisor about an impaired employee will only complicate matters and get him or her fired.
☐ True ☐ False

What Would You Do?

Wilma noticed Betty stumble at her workstation, so she asked if she could help. Betty gruffly said "no," at which point Wilma smelled alcohol on her breath. Wilma returned to her own workstation and kept quiet about the incident. She thought it was none of her business and didn't want to get Betty in trouble. Did she make the right decision? Why or why not?

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FOR THE LEADER

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BEFORE THE TALK 7 PREPARATION TIPS

- 1 Background information**
<http://www.dol.gov/workingpartners/welcome.html>
- 2** Find a substance abuse counselor to speak to your workers about the warning signs of dependence and how to deal with a problem.
- 3** Find a news report of a serious workplace incident resulting from drug or alcohol abuse.
- 4** Conduct a search of injury reports relating to substance abuse at work. Prepare to discuss the circumstances with your workers.
- 5 Find a real-life fatality report, for example:**
An experienced press operator died after being struck with pieces of the equipment. The fatality report indicated he had alcohol and drugs in his system.
- 6** Plan a role-playing scenario where two workers try to help a fellow employee who is drunk on the job. Solicit feedback from your crew.
- 7 Fact:** Many treatment and recovery programs are available to workers who need help with substance addiction.

■ For information on a variety of safety topics, check out Bongarde's online network for safety professionals at <http://www.SafetyXChange.org>

■ If you want the latest in job safety news, tips, photos, health-related articles, fatality reports and audio talks, sign up for Safety Smart! Weekly Briefing at <http://www.SafetySmart.com>

AFTER THE TALK CHECKLIST

- Provided extra training to workers who did poorly on quiz
Date: _____
- Observed workers
Date: _____
- Refresher training
Date: _____
- Other (describe)

Date: _____

DATE: _____

LOCATION: _____

MEETING CONDUCTED BY: _____

MEETING WAS ATTENDED BY: Each participant is to sign below, for record kept on file.

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Answers to T1603-03 Quiz:

1. False 2. True 3. True 4. True 5. False