

This NASC guidance note has been revised to communicate the key requirements to consider when implementing a substance abuse policy. The NASC would endorse a zero tolerance approach to illegal drugs based upon the safety critical nature of scaffolding. A similar approach would also be supported for the misuse of alcohol with the alcohol cut off limits in line with your own company policy.

Research shows that people who abuse alcohol and take illegal drugs, are more than three times as likely to have an accident at work and that substance abuse is a major factor in ill health absence.

The earlier that substance abuse can be detected the earlier help can be given and health and safety concerns substantially reduced.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

Substance abuse affects the functioning of both body and mind and can increase the chance of having an accident or causing an accident. The damaging health effects of substance abuse may increase when combined with exposure to hazardous substances in the workplace.

Hand/eye co-ordination, vision, and alertness are affected by alcohol or other drugs and the chances of injury or causing an accident are increased.

IS THERE A PROBLEM?

You may want to explore carefully some key areas of your business:

- Sickness record - are there any periods of unexplained or frequently taken absence?
- Behavioural changes - what behavioural changes have you noticed in any employee?
- Productivity - are there any unexplained dips in productivity?
- Accident records/near misses - have the number of accidents or near misses increased or involved particular employees?
- Disciplinary problems - have you noticed particular performance or conduct problems with any employees?

These may help you to find out if drug misuse is harming your business.

HOW DOES SUBSTANCE ABUSE AT WORK AFFECT HEALTH?

Substance abuse can affect concentration, physical co-ordination, mental alertness, reaction times, vision and energy levels. Abusers may find it difficult to carry out their usual tasks correctly or accurately, and may not be able to react as quickly if something goes wrong.

WHY SHOULD SUBSTANCE ABUSE BE TACKLED?

The successful tackling of substance abuse can benefit a company by:

- Reducing the risk of accidents
- Creating a more productive environment by offering support to those employees who declare a drug-related problem, thus improving morale;
- Enhancing the public perception of your organisation as a responsible employer;
- Reducing the cost of absenteeism or impaired productivity
- Contributing to society's efforts to combat substance abuse
- Saving on the cost of recruiting and training new employees to replace those whose employment might be terminated because of untreated abuse

ADDRESSING SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Consultation with employees is essential if substance abuse problems are to be addressed adequately. This can be achieved either by direct consultation or with workplace health and safety representatives. Unions, employer associations and professional bodies can advise and assist in developing a substance abuse policy.

- The substance abuse policy must as a minimum:
- Clearly state the behaviour expected of employees
- Apply equally to all employees
- Be part of the company health and safety policy
- Result from adequate consultation with employees
- Be made known to all employees
- Address issues in the work environment that may increase substance abuse
- Be non punitive particularly if an employee admits to the company that he/she has a problem and seeks advice and help
- Provide treatment and rehabilitation for employees with problems
- Be evaluated, after implementation and amended as necessary.

SUBSTANCE ABUSE POLICY: IMPLEMENTATION

Implementing such a policy has four essential components:

- Education and information –to all employees and be part of the induction training for new recruits, including details on the harmful effects of substance abuse.
- Organisational support – all management staff must demonstrate support and observance of the policy
- Addressing issues in the work environment – that may contribute to substance abuse, because of the rigours and stress of work
- Prevention and rehabilitation support- The provision of treatment and or referral services can provide significant benefits. Confidentiality for your employee(s) undergoing treatment and rehabilitation must be guaranteed. Also, employees should not be disadvantaged in terms of promotion or seniority because they have sought or are accepting help. Treatment and rehabilitation should be covered by adequate leave entitlements.

IDENTIFICATION OF ALCOHOL AND DRUG PROBLEMS

Ways of identifying substance abuse problems among your employees include:

- Self-identification and or self-referral for treatment
- Identification by a co-worker
- Identification by a supervisor
- Testing

Educating employees about the nature of alcohol and drug problems, the company policy and treatment options, will improve the chances of the affected person or a co-worker identifying that a problem exists.

The benefits of such identification need to be clear and need to guarantee that employees who seek help will not be disadvantaged or punished. Management, supervisors and employees should not interfere in someone's private life unless aspects of that person's use of alcohol or drug affects work performance or exceeds legal or client compliance limits.

Supervisors or managers should only identify or refer where there are performance deficits or other work-related indications that a problem may exist. For example an employee may have:

- Many days off work
- Sudden mood changes
- Irritable or aggressive episodes
- A tendency to become confused
- Poor time keeping

Supervisors / Managers may need training to be effective in identifying and addressing problems.

Research has shown that there are some false urine kits on the market, namely Quick Fix Plus: a synthetic premixed laboratory urine which can be purchased on the internet or locally. Quick Fix Plus is unisex and contains all the ingredients normally found in urine and is balanced for pH, specific gravity, creatinine, and several other urine characteristics. The Quick Fix Plus 3 ounce bottle comes with an attached temperature strip and heating pad to ensure the sample is at proper temperature.

WHY SCREEN FOR SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Apart from the health risk, even casual drug users can feel ill for days after intoxication, which may have a significant impact on how they behave at work. Statistics from the Home Office Crime Survey for England & Wales 2015/16 state around 1 in 12 (8.4%) adults aged 16 to 59 had taken an illicit drug in the last year. This is approximately 2.7 million people.

Over one-third (35%) of adults aged 16 to 59 had taken an illicit drug at some point during their lifetime.

Methods Used for Testing

There are several methods used for substance abuse:

- Breath testing for alcohol
- Urine testing for drugs
- Blood testing for alcohol and drugs
- Hair testing for drugs
- Oral Fluid for Drugs

Which test to use

There are two types of D&A Testing, Laboratory-based Testing and Point of Care Testing. If you decide as a company to implement a D&A Testing Programme the NASC would suggest that it would be best to contact an approved medical D&A Testing provider for advice to select the best programme for your requirements.

Consider this simple example; Snort cocaine, and the drug enters your blood stream and affects your brain in under 10 seconds. Minutes later, it's detected in your oral fluid. In a matter of hours its metabolites can be found in your urine. A week later, remnants can be found in the cortex of the hair cut from your scalp.

Oral fluid test can only detect very recent use, and actual impairment, but not historical use.

Urine tests detect drug use over the previous few days, but not drugs consumed within a few hours prior to testing.

Hair analysis detects drug use in the last three months, but drugs aren't detected until a week after use.

When Might Testing be Used?

Screening or testing to detect substance abuse can be through:

- Recruitment screening
A test used to assess all job applicants for drug or excess alcohol use.
- Random testing
This is the test usually used as a deterrent for detecting use by those in safety sensitive jobs or where significant substance abuse is thought to exist. Random testing may help to identify substance abuse not previously detected. It can be counter productive and cause resentment amongst staff, particularly in non-safety critical situations. The introduction of random testing must be advised in writing to all employees in advance of implementation ideally with a question and answer supporting document and must be seen to be fair, by being completely random and apply to all staff.
- Routine testing
Similar to random testing but done at specified times, such as before starting work. In relation to drugs this sends out a clear message that drug use is not tolerated. Alcohol testing is more appropriate for staff in safety critical jobs, protecting the individual, colleagues and the general public.
- With cause testing
This is used as a compliment to an accident or incident investigation where it will confirm or deny that substance abuse has played a part in the event
- Impairment testing
This can be used to assess performance at a given moment in time, through for instance, hand eye coordination. Reduced concentration, reaction time or motor skills affected by recent substance abuse can be detected. Whilst measuring an ability to perform tasks these tests provide no indication of past drug use.

PRESCRIBED DRUGS OR MEDICINES

Many prescribed medicines can affect mental or physical functioning. If someone is taking medicine for any reason they need to find out if it will affect their or others safety at work and advise their line manager accordingly.

Where random testing is company or client policy employees should inform their manager immediately of any prescribed medicines or any remedies being taken as some over the counter cold remedies or pain killers will show up in tests.

ILLEGAL / RECREATIONAL DRUG USE

Depending on the type and quantity of drug(s) used, the ability to function safely at work could be seriously affected. This can include impairment of physical coordination, vision, concentration and alertness. Someone may be so 'out of it' that they are too dangerous to be at work at all.

HOW DO I KNOW IF I HAVE A PROBLEM?

There are several different signs that something could be wrong. These can include physical, mental or social problems – e.g. you may feel unwell, tired or depressed; you could be having trouble concentrating, be making a lot of mistakes, or having lots of minor injuries; or perhaps you are taking days off work to recover from alcohol or drugs, or getting into fights or arguments at work because you've become subject to mood swings and aggression.

If one or more of the following descriptions applies to you, get a medical check-up or think about reducing or cutting out your alcohol or recreational/illegal drug use.

Alcohol:

- I regularly drink more than the recommended number of units per week
- I go to work when I'm hung-over;
- I drink heavily late into the night and go to work early the next day;
- I need a drink at lunchtime or during the day
- I feel sick, get the shakes, or feel worried or 'nervy' if I don't have a drink;
- I miss work because of hangovers

ILLEGAL DRUGS (e.g. heroin, cocaine, speed, ecstasy, marijuana):

- I have difficulty concentrating;
- I often feel tired or uninterested in things;
- I am clumsy or have poor coordination;
- I have problems with my vision

Don't forget by indulging in illegal or recreational drugs or alcohol you may lose your job and end up with a criminal record!

If you think you might have a drug or alcohol problem, you could be endangering your and others safety at work so you should approach your employer for some advice and help.

In law your employer must make sure that your workplace is safe and healthy – this includes making sure employees who may be affected by alcohol or drugs are not putting themselves or others in danger.

As an employee you are required to:

- Follow instructions and rules in your workplace. For example; carry out your work in the way you have been instructed or trained to do;
- Work and behave in ways which are safe and do not endanger the health and safety of yourself or others in your workplace.

PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS

If you think your substance abuse is a problem for you or a danger to others, seek advice. For example:

- Find out if your company has a confidential service that can help you
- Talk to your local GP
- Talk to your workplace health and safety adviser or your supervisor / manager
- Contact a confidential telephone help service – numbers are in the front of the telephone book
- Contact your local community health centre
- Talk to a family member.

SUBSTANCE ABUSE TESTING IN THE WORKPLACE

• *The Legal Situation*

- You have a general duty under the **Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974** (HSW Act) to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of your employees. You also have a duty under the **Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999**, to assess the risks to the health and safety of your employees. If you knowingly allow an employee under the influence of drug misuse to continue working and his or her behaviour places the employee or others at risk, you could be prosecuted. Your employees are also required to take reasonable care of themselves and others who could be affected by what they do at work.
- The **Transport and Works Act 1992** makes it a criminal offence for certain workers to be unfit through drugs and/or drink while working on railways, tramways and other guided transport systems. The operators of the transport system would also be guilty of an offence unless they had shown all due diligence in trying to prevent such an offence being committed.
- The principal legislation in the UK for controlling the misuse of drugs is the **Misuse of Drugs Act 1971**. Nearly all drugs with misuse and/or dependence liability are covered by it. The Act makes the production, supply and possession of these controlled drugs unlawful except in certain specified circumstances (for example, when they have been prescribed by a doctor). If you knowingly permit the production or supply of any controlled drugs, the smoking of cannabis or certain other activities to take place on your premises you could be committing an offence.

Or get further advice and assistance from:

National Drugs Help Line: 0800 7766 000 (Free, confidential, 24 hours a day)

The Scottish Drugs Forum: 0141 221 1175

RELEASE: 020 7729 9904

Alcohol Concern: 020 7928 7377 or 08009178282
Email: www.contact@alcoholconcern.org.uk

Drugs scope: 020 7928 1211
Email: www.drugscope.org.uk

Narcotics Anonymous: 0845 3733 366
Email: www.NAHelpline@uknd.org

Hope UK: 020 7928 0848
Email: www.a.wilson@hope.uk.org

Alcoholics Anonymous: 0845 7697 555

REFERENCES

Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974;

Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999;

Transport and Works Act 1992;

Misuse of Drugs Act 1971

Whilst every effort has been made to provide reliable and accurate information, we would welcome any corrections to information provided by the Writer which may not be entirely accurate, therefore and for this reason, the NASC or indeed the Writer, cannot accept responsibility for any misinformation posted.



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