



## HUMAN RESOURCES

# PREVENTING SUBSTANCE ABUSE IN THE WORKPLACE

DRUG AND alcohol use by employees on or off the job is a troublesome societal plague that has put many employers on the defensive.

Research by the U.S. Department of Labor shows that between 10% and 20% of the nation's workers who die on the job test positive for alcohol or other substances.

The same research shows that industries with the highest rates of drug use are the most physically dangerous and involve the operation of machinery, such as construction, mining, manufacturing and wholesale.

With this in mind, you need to know all of the tools available to you as an employer to ensure that you keep a strong drug- and alcohol-free workplace policy in place, while trying to minimize the effects of employees who are heavy users off the job.

An effective policy can reduce the risk of workplace injuries to an impaired employee as well as co-workers and anybody your company may come in contact with, particularly customers or vendors. The actions of one impaired person, or someone that uses heavily off the job, can have far-reaching effects and turn out to be a significant liability for your company.

Various Occupational Health and Safety Administrations at both the federal and state level offer employers help in sorting out the complexities of putting together an effective drug- and alcohol-free workplace policy.

Federal OSHA outlines five components it considers necessary for a drug-free workplace: a policy, supervisor training, employee education, employee assistance and drug testing.

Drug testing, it says, "must be reasonable and take into consideration employee rights to privacy."

The federal agency has guidelines available to help resource-challenged small businesses formulate a policy aimed at a drug- and alcohol-free workplace. They include:

- **Drug-Free Workplace Advisor Program Builder.** For employers needing to develop a policy from scratch, this guides them through the various components of a comprehensive written drug-free workplace policy. It then generates a policy based on an employer's specific needs.

- **Substance Abuse Information Database.** This includes sample drug-free workplace policies, surveys, research reports, training and educational materials and regulatory information.
- **Resource directories.** These contain current lists of national, state and local resources, including summaries of state laws on workplace-related substance abuse, community organizations that help make businesses drug-free, and help lines for those who have a drug problem.
- **Training and educational materials.** These include presentations, articles, fact sheets and posters to help employers provide workplace drug and alcohol education.

More detailed information for each of the above guidelines is online at: [www.osha.gov/SLTC/substanceabuse/index.html](http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/substanceabuse/index.html)

### Example from Down Under

One good approach to drug and alcohol policies comes from New Zealand. Its OSHA – in simple, practical language – advises employers in that country to:

- Formulate rules, agreed to by all parties, which apply the same for everyone: employees, contractors and employers.
- Write the policy clearly and make it available to all in the workplace.
- Describe steps needed to ensure a drug- and alcohol-free workplace.
- Enforce the rules "consistently and fairly."

### Employee assistance programs

If you do not have one already, you should seriously consider instituting an employee assistance program (EAP).

The program should be free for employees to access and open to all staff.

It should provide quality education, counseling, direction and referrals for rehabilitation services, and it must coordinate with local and available community resources.

Trained EAP providers can direct employees to get the help they need and advise them on their rights. They can also inform employees regarding available resources.