



SAFETY2BUSINESS

## FIGHTING DRUG & ALCOHOL ABUSE AT THE WORKPLACE



### THE FACTS

The estimate number of people in the UK having addiction to a certain type of substance or activity is more than 2 million. This means that, in your workplace, the likelihood of working or managing someone with an addiction is potentially high.

As human beings, we are morally responsible for helping others when they are not psychologically stable. However, such type of incentives are rather a personal choice and an individual response than a duty. To this point, co-workers can help their colleagues fight addictions but, in most of the cases, they do that only if they have developed a close relationship with them and care about each other. On the other hand, employers are legally responsible (and consequently accountable) for assessing 'reasonably foreseeable' risks and putting in place adequate control measures to eliminate or reduce them so far as is reasonably practicable. Duty holders who knowingly allow employees to work under the influence of alcohol or drugs, where this can affect the health and safety of themselves and/or the rest of the staff, break the law and therefore could be prosecuted.

### THE HIDDEN RISKS

It is important to bear in mind that not only illegal drugs can have detrimental effects at the workplace. Legal ones, such as prescription drugs and tranquilizers, are very often misused too and/or can affect the safe performance of daily work duties. It is often the case that an employee has a condition which requires drugs to help them live a normal life and, unfortunately, in many cases, their employer does not even know about this. The main reason is that a big number of organisations don't have a written drugs and alcohol policy at all. This leads to duty holders not being aware of the wellbeing of their staff (including their mental state) and, as a result, not taking any control measures to eliminate or at least reduce the potential risks. And it is not just the health and safety of the addicted that is put at stake... The list of potential consequences regarding this tendency of passive performance of management duties is long and very often the aftermath is irreversible.

### FIGHT IT BACK

Nowadays all of us have the freedom to do whatever we find good with our lives. This makes it impossible for employers and anyone to effectively forbid another human being the use of drugs and alcohol. Carrying out routine drug tests is very often not worth the cost or the hassle. And let's be honest, it is also kind of intrusive. However, that doesn't mean that there's nothing employers can do. Ignoring the problem equals to washing one's hands with excuses. You don't want to be Pontius Pilate because the price is too high (on many grounds) to do so. Not just from a moral point of view.

### RECOGNISE THE SIGNS

Just like every other risk in life, you can fight drugs and alcohol abuse simply by noticing it. Yes, you heard me right- it is often the case that employers don't even know that someone from their team is addicted and it is entirely their negligence to blame. Look for the common signs such as peculiar behavior, absenteeism, poor performance and mood swings- you don't need to be a psychologist to monitor these.



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### HAVE A WRITTEN DRUGS AND ALCOHOL POLICY

Having a written drugs and alcohol policy in place is probably the most beneficial action which you should take as a duty holder. Bear in mind that this is not a voluntary act of yours anyway- you are legally obliged to have one. According to the BMA's new guidance alcohol and drugs workplace policies "are more successful when conceived as a component of health and welfare policy, rather than primarily a disciplinary matter."

### SHOW REAL LIFE CASES

Having heard of the catastrophic consequences of drugs and alcohol abuse is not the same as seeing them and being informed about the actual statistics. There are many documentaries which show real life cases which emphasize the problem and have the power to catch the attention on an emotional level. The common practice of overlooking alcohol and drug misuse at the workplace because 'you are not paid for that' will actually make you pay for ignoring it. You can certainly find a slot during your staff meetings to raise awareness and avoid/minimise potential consequences.

### EDUCATE YOUR STAFF

You might be pleasantly surprised to know that there are actual drug-free workplace programmes for training your staff, especially the employees with managerial responsibilities. Surprise number two is that some of them are completely FREE to attend which leaves you without any considerable excuses.

Some of the components which the courses cover are:

- creating a drug free workplace policy;
- training of supervisors;
- staff education and employee assistance.

Train your staff today to avoid serious consequences tomorrow. If you avoid being proactive in terms of the health and safety of your staff your passiveness will surely bite you back and it would not be cheap!