

DRUGS &

WORKING OUT A SENSIBLE DRUGS AND ALCOHOL POLICY

HAZARDS FACTSHEET 77

ALCOHOL

When it comes to dealing responsibly with drinking problems at work, research shows we should target the boardroom, not the bar room. And dealing with drugs at work can mean giving management methods a fix. Frequently the problem is more work style than lifestyle.

IN December 2001, the TUC launched its *Drunk or disordered* guide to drugs and alcohol in the workplace. It called on employers to develop workplace policies.

TUC general secretary John Monks said: "Trade unionists should see that effective policies are pursued at work, both to prevent substance abuse and to help those who may have become dependent on alcohol or drugs.

"Employers have a duty of care to their employees under both employment and health and safety law... The introduction of a comprehensive, planned drug and alcohol policy covering the whole of the work force can have significant benefits for employers, employees with an alcohol or drug problem, as well as for their colleagues."

The TUC guide calls on employers to: Recognise that alcohol/drug misuse is a health problem; prevent drug/alcohol misuse by developing awareness programmes; identify employees with a problem at an early stage; and provide assistance to employees with drug/alcohol related problems.

The guide says:

- ◆ The lifestyle imposed by a person's job may greatly increase the risk of alcohol or drug abuse;
- ◆ stress may be a contributory factor;
- ◆ if the problem is ignored, eventually

the person's job will be at risk; and
◆ substance misusers can be a hazard to themselves and others in the workplace.

The guide adds: "Trade unionists should see that effective policies are pursued at work, both to prevent substance abuse and to help those who may have become dependent on alcohol or drugs."

Those union reps have a big job to do. TUC cites an Institute for Personnel and Development study showing that more than one in four organisations (43 per cent) do not have a drug and alcohol policy in place, and the great majority (84 per cent) do not run awareness programmes for staff.

TUC says successful policies must have commitment from the most senior management level. Policies should:

- ◆ Recognise that alcohol/drug misuse is a health problem;
- ◆ prevent drug/alcohol misuse through awareness programmes;
- ◆ identify employees with a problem at an early stage; and
- ◆ provide assistance to employees with drug/alcohol related problems.

Blame work style

A bad job can drive you to drink or drugs and employers should give serious thought to how their actions can damage the physical and emotional health of their employees (*Hazards* 58).

A December 2000 US study published in the *Journal of Applied Psychology* concluded that where work problems interfered with family life, affected workers were three times more likely to have a mood disorder, such as depression, 2.5 times more likely to have an anxiety disorder and twice as likely to have a "substance dependence disorder."

The situation was even worse where family problems impinged on work, with substance dependence 11 times

as common in workers with these conflicts.

Researcher Michael Frone commented that "in terms of practical implications, the present results suggest employers should not overlook work-to-family and family-to-work conflict as a source of stress in the lives of employed men and women.

"Of course, simply developing strategies and programmes to reduce either type of work-family conflict is not enough. Corporate cultures also must change so that employees feel comfortable taking advantage of the available resources."

Failing the test

Why can the Alco-Cops measure the alcohol in your breath at work – a company has been selling workplace breathalysers for a couple of years now – but never consider measuring the levels of the dozens of toxic chemicals on site?

TUC notes: "The available data do not produce sufficient evidence to show that alcohol and drug testing programmes improve productivity and safety in the workplace... No adequate tests currently exist which can accurately assess the effect of alcohol and drug use on job performance."

The guide adds: "A well-developed and effective health and safety management policy, and the confidence that brings, is the best way of dealing with drugs in the workplace.

"However, if an employer is determined to go ahead with a testing regime this should only take place within the context of a workplace alcohol and drug policy developed in consultation with the trade unions and the work force."

Hazards warned in 1996 that workplace drugs tests could be costly, inaccurate, discriminatory, a diversion from real workplace health problems and a civil rights abuse (*Hazards* 55).

The law

In addition to general drugs and road traffic legislation, workplace safety laws can apply.

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 rail-ways, tramways and other guided transport systems. The operators of the transport system would be guilty of an offence unless they had shown all due diligence in trying to prevent such an offence.

General duties: The Health and Safety at Work Etc Act 1974 places a duty on the employer to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of their employees. The Management of Health and Safety at Work

Drugs and alcohol policy at work

The TUC guide says a policy should be comprehensive and should ensure workers feel confident to report rather than hide problems.

Scope the policy should apply to all, including top managers.

Participation wherever possible this should be voluntary, with job security not prejudiced and rehabilitation a central element.

The programme should include prevention, identification, treatment and rehabilitation.

Training the policy should include a programme on the prevention of alcohol and drug related problems in the workplace through information, education and training.

Referrals may be made by the individual worker who considers he or she may have a problem, by management or by a supervisor, by family members, a colleague or trade union representative. The employer may refer the worker for medical examination or assessment by a qualified professional who will advise the worker if treatment is needed.

Reintegration this should describe the duties and responsibilities of the individual during and after treatment.

Review this needs to be at regular intervals, to help refine and improve the programme.

Confidentiality participation in the programme and information arising from that participation should remain strictly confidential.

Assistance the policy must make clear that the procedures for assisting employees with substance misuse related problems are separate from the disciplinary procedure.

Discipline the policy should say at what stage or in what circumstances the disciplinary procedures will be invoked, for example if an individual with a drug or alcohol related problem refuses assistance, denies the problem, or discontinues a course of treatment and reverts to unsatisfactory levels of performance and conduct.

Safety critical jobs it should be agreed which tasks are "safety critical," so being under the influence of drugs or alcohol becomes an immediate disciplinary offence.

TUC summary. A detailed guide to a workplace drugs and alcohol policy can be found in the TUC *Drunk or Disordered* guide (see information)

I'm not swallowing that!

Alcohol Concern, in its 2000 report *Britain's Ruin*, claims that "workers that misuse alcohol are 2 to 3 times more likely to be involved in an industrial accident," with up to 25 per cent of work accidents involving "intoxicated workers." This figure finds its way into dozens of "expert" guides. In fact, the source cited by Alcohol Concern is a study on "home and leisure" accident risks. Getting intoxicated in a pub or at home is a lot easier to carry off than it is in a workplace.

HSE's main guidance, *Don't mix it*, is explicit: "There are no precise figures on the number of workplace accidents where alcohol is a factor." One of the few pieces of workplace research cited by Alcohol Concern showed over 90 per cent of all workers attending casualty after a workplace accident had no alcohol at all in their systems.

Regulations require employers to assess the risks to the health and safety of their employees.

The Work in Compressed Air Regulations: Places duties on contractors and on workers.

Information

The TUC guide *Drunk or disordered*, ISBN 1 85006 616 7, is available price £15.00 (£4.75 to union members) from TUC Publications, tel: 020 7467 1294
web: www.tuc.org.uk/publications
Hazards drink, drugs and smoking webpage: www.hazards.org/workstyle
Don't mix it! A guide for employers on alcohol at work. HSE booklet, ref. IND(G)240L. The Health and Safety Executive's website has a page on alcohol at work: www.hse.gov.uk/hthdir/noframes/alcohol.htm

Drug abuse at work: a guide for employers. HSE booklet, ref. IND(G)91L.
www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg240.htm
Single copies of both free from HSE Books. Tel: 01787 881165.

The Drug and Alcohol Workplace Service, a joint Alcohol Concern and DrugScope, aims to increase the number of employers with an active and effective alcohol and drug policy. The address for both organisations is The Workplace Liaison Officer can be contacted by ringing 020 7928 7377, by emailing workplace@alcoholconcern.org.uk or by writing to 32-36 Loman Street, London SE1 0EE. More from: DrugScope, tel: 020 7928 1211, web: www.drugscope.org.uk and Alcohol Concern, tel: 020 7928 7377, web: www.alcoholconcern.org.uk
Many unions have issued excellent advice. If you are not in a union phone the TUC "Know Your Rights" information line 0870 600 4 882 to find out which one is best for you.

