

Alcohol and other drugs in the Workplace ●

Alcohol and other drugs (including prescribed, or over the counter medicine) can affect a person's ability to work safely and can impact on employee health. The following fact sheet outlines some of the impacts that alcohol and other drugs can have in your workplace.

The impact of alcohol and drugs on the workplace

The use of alcohol and other drugs can impact on workplaces in a number of ways, including affecting relationships, safety, productivity and your business reputation.

Alcohol and other drugs are having a negative impact on workplaces as shown by the following:

- Alcohol alone costs Australian workplaces an estimated \$6 billion per year in lost productivity¹
- Australian workers admitted to taking almost 11.5 million sick days as a result of their alcohol and/or drug use²
- Nearly one in 10 workers reported drinking at work, almost 1% reported using drugs at work and almost 6% and 2% reported going to work under the influence of alcohol or another drug, respectively³
- One in 10 workers say they have experienced the negative effects associated with a coworker's misuse of alcohol. The negative effects can include: reduced ability to do the job, increased risk of being involved in an accident or close call, working extra hours to cover for a co-worker, or time taken off work⁴.

How do hangovers and “coming down” affect your work?

Having a hangover or coming down from drugs at work can be just as problematic as being intoxicated. Headaches, blurred vision, irritability, problems concentrating and extreme tiredness can all create problems for you and your co-workers.

ALCOHOL: Sobering up takes time and on average, if you are in good health, your body can process one standard drink per hour. It is important to know that more often than not you are not consuming one standard drink. For example, a typical glass of wine or stubbie of beer both have approximately 1.5 standard drinks which can take 1.5 hours to process. Hangover cures like cold showers, exercise, strong coffee or being sick will not speed up the process. They might make you feel better, but they will not change your Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC). BAC is the level of alcohol in your bloodstream, and is used to measure how much alcohol is present in relation to blood in your body. Time is the only way to reduce your BAC, wait for your body to process the alcohol.

OTHER DRUGS: It can take several days to come down from drugs like ecstasy, ice or amphetamines, so using these drugs on the weekend can still affect your ability to work safely and productively the following week.

PHARMACEUTICAL DRUGS: There is always a level of risk when using any drug, including prescription or over-the-counter medications. Reactions will vary person to person, and it's best to follow your doctor's advice to minimise impact/s of your medication(s) on your work. You should inform your manager if you are taking a prescribed drug or over the counter medication that could impact your ability to do your job safely and effectively.

Your rights and responsibilities

It's important to consider how your use of alcohol or drugs may impact on your co-workers. The *OHS Act 2011* imposes a duty on all workers not to recklessly endanger any other persons in the workplace. Different industries and workplaces may have more specific requirements for employers and employees detailed in a policy. For example, some industries and workplaces may require people driving vehicles to have a BAC of 0.00. Others may have policies about testing employees for alcohol intoxication. Make sure you are aware of your rights and responsibilities around alcohol and other drugs within your workplace or industry, by reading your alcohol and drug policy.

Employer responsibilities

Employers have a legal obligation to address alcohol and other drug issues in the workplace through the 'duty of care' provisions in the *OHS Act 2011*. These provisions require employers to take all reasonable and 'practicable' steps to ensure the health and safety of all workers and any other people who may be affected by the actions of the employer, such as contractors or clients.

Concerned about a co-worker?

If you are concerned about a co-worker who might be under the influence of alcohol or other drugs, it is best to follow up with the appropriate person in your organisation based on the organisation's alcohol and drug policy. If you are noticing a pattern of behaviour in someone, it is a good idea to take note of when incidents happen so that you can refer to this when talking to the appropriate person in your organisation. If your workplace has an alcohol and other drug policy, follow the procedures outlined in this document.

If your workplace does not have an alcohol policy you may wish to discuss the issue with:

- Your health and safety representative
- A member of the health and safety team or other formal workplace committee
- Your manager, supervisor or employer.

If you're concerned about your alcohol or drug use, there is free help available.

Call the National Alcohol and Other Drug Hotline on 1800 250 015.

References

1. Manning, M., Smith, C., & Mazerolle, P. (2013). *The societal costs of alcohol misuse in Australia. Trends & Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*(454), 1–6. Retrieved from <http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/current%20series/tandi.aspx>
2. Roche, A., Pidd, K., & Kostadinov, V. (2015). *Alcohol and drug-related absenteeism: a costly problem. Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, 40(3), 236–238.
3. Pidd, K., Roche, A. M., & Buisman-Pijlman, F. (2011). *Intoxicated workers: findings from a national Australian survey. Addiction*, 106, 1623–1633. doi:10.1111/j.13600443.2011.03462.x
4. Dale, C. E., & Livingston, M. J. (2010). *The burden of alcohol drinking on co-workers in the Australian workplace. Medical Journal of Australia*, 193(3), 138–140.



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