

Alcohol, Drugs and the Workplace



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The Social Dialogue Forum (SDF) of the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA) is a joint forum of senior managers, employer organisations representatives, senior Trades Union representatives and Acas. The SDF reports directly to the main SEEDA Board, aiming to bring the social and human dimension to the world of work. It identifies good practice by involving and developing social dialogue at a regional, local and workplace level.

Introduction

This leaflet highlights good practice concerning key workplace issues. The information contained is not a policy of SEEDA or any organisation that is a member of the Forum. It aims to bring together good practice that can be used by both employers and employees so that the issues of drugs and alcohol can be understood and discussed openly and fairly in the workplace.

Drug and Alcohol Issues in the Workplace

The SDF recognises the harmful effects of drug and alcohol misuse to employees and work performance. It acknowledges the damage to people's health, work and domestic relationships and the costs to employers in terms of accidents, absenteeism, mistakes, remedial work and loss of valuable staff and custom.

the Scale of the Problem

Alcohol:

- **Up to 17 million working days are lost each year through alcohol related absence.**
- **Alcohol misuse among employees costs up to £6.4 billion a year in lost productivity through increased absenteeism, unemployment and premature death.**

(Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy For England, Prime Minister's Strategy Unit - 2004)

- **75% of employers have suffered absenteeism as a result of alcohol misuse.**

(Alcohol Concern - 2003)

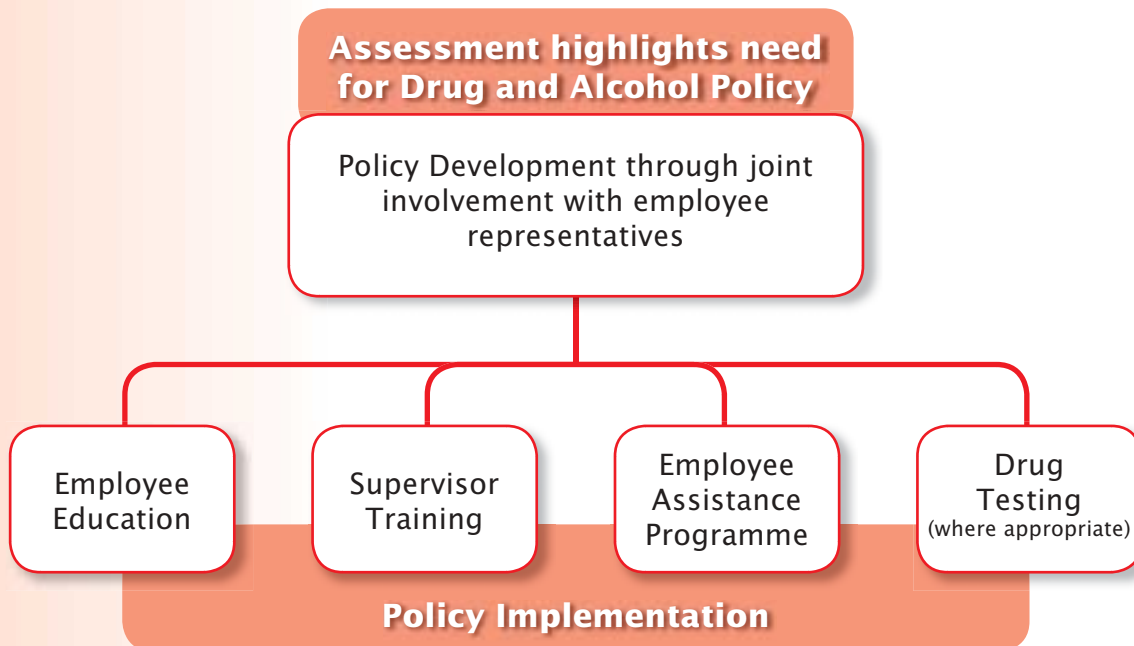
Drugs:

- **Of all 16-59 year olds, 12% had taken an illicit drug and 3% had used a Class A drug in the last year.**

(2002/2003 British Crime Survey)

Components of a Workplace Programme

There is not a 'right' way to develop a workplace programme as environments vary and some employers may only be interested in certain components. The decision will depend on the level of concern about the problem, such as safety, security and the potential for misuse.



Recommendations for a Successful Workplace Programme

- **Think things through**
Think ahead, define clear goals and seek advice from other employers, specialists, Trades Unions and impartial third parties, such as Acas.
- **Involve Trades Unions and employees from the start**
The most valuable resource to an organisation is its staff. Staff can help communicate the message, clarify goals and make sure the programme fits into the daily reality of the workplace. Estimates indicate that at least eight out of ten employees are probably not misusing alcohol or drugs – they are already part of the solution.
- **Emphasise fairness**
Drug and alcohol programmes are important issues. Violating the organisational policy could mean someone losing their job. Procedural rules should be clear, fair and consistently applied, with provision for appeal. With these provisions in place, employees and Trades Unions are more likely to support the programme and trust the employer to implement it fairly.
- **Consider the collective bargaining process**
Where drug testing is being considered, discussing the policy and procedures with staff representatives is essential. Trades Unions have knowledge and experience in this area.
- **Protect confidentiality**
Employees will have faith in a programme when they know confidentiality is assured.

Developing a Policy

A written policy is essential for an effective programme:

- It may be required by an organisation's insurers;
- It makes legal review possible;
- It provides a record of the employer's effort and a reference if the policy is challenged;
- It may protect the employers and employees in certain circumstances;
- It is easier to explain and understand when it is written down.



Contents of the Policy

Issues to be considered in a written policy:

- Introduction – including the reasons for such a policy;
- Aims and objectives of the policy – what should the policy achieve?;
- Responsibilities – of managers, supervisors and all employees;
- Definitions – e.g. dependency, illegal drugs, prescribed drugs;
- Rules – key rules that must be complied with;
- Confidentiality statement;
- Education – raising awareness of risks to staff;
- Training – to ensure consistent and fair application of the policy;
- Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) – how help is provided;
- When disciplinary procedures may be used;
- Monitoring and evaluation of the policy.

It is important to obtain commitment from employees at all levels in the organisation, as the process of forming and implementing a policy is as important as the policy itself. The policy should be consistent with other workplace policies and procedures and any relevant legislation.

It is suggested the following be considered:



Drug Testing

Drug testing can be helpful but it can also be a source of controversy, anxiety and concern among employers and employees. Therefore, it is a big decision to introduce it. A successful testing programme requires careful negotiation, planning, consistently applied procedures, strict confidentiality and provisions for appeal. Here are some helpful hints when considering the introduction of drug testing:

Do:

- Become familiar with common symptoms of drug misuse;
- Assume that no one in your organisation is immune to drug misuse;
- Become familiar with each employee's skills, abilities and normal performance;
- Document job performance regularly, objectively and consistently for all employees;
- Keep written records that objectively document the performance of troubled employees. These can be used as a basis for referral to the EAP, treatment programme and/or for testing;
- Know the exact steps to be taken when an employee has a problem and is ready to seek help;
- Obtain appropriate advice when a problem is identified or suspected and have a witness to any actions when approaching an employee;
- Take advice.

Don't:

- Misuse the testing procedures to discipline employees for unrelated problems;
- Single out any employee, or group of employees, for scrutiny under the policy. Be consistent in your actions with all employee groups or classes;
- Implement a verbal policy. An effective policy must be written, circulated and acknowledged in writing by employees in order to have strong legal standing;
- Treat employees who test positive differently. All employees who test positive must be treated consistently to maintain the integrity of the programme;
- Take action against employees based on the results of a drug screen only. Always obtain the results of a gas chromatography/mass spectrometry (GC/MS) confirmation test before taking action;
- Offer rehabilitation selectively;
- Address drug misuse without including alcohol misuse in the policy;
- Implement a policy and programme unilaterally. Consult the workforce, the relevant unions and other representatives of the staff.

Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs)

EAPs do not have to be complicated for employers and can be the most effective way to deal with alcohol or drug problems in the workplace. They can enhance the work climate of an organisation and promote the health and well being of all parties involved. They can either be provided by a third party or within the organisation. The important principle is that a system of help exists if an employee asks for it, or is identified as having a drug or alcohol problem. They can also be tailored for particular sizes of organisations.

For employees of a small business, this could mean provision of an initial assessment, followed by access to treatment if and when required. These issues can be addressed through either their GP, or by access to advice through a local treatment agency.

In large businesses, EAPs are usually multi-faceted programmes designed to assist employees with personal problems that affect their job performance. Although some EAPs focus primarily on alcohol or drug problems, most address a wide range of problems including stress, other medical problems and financial difficulties.

The employer should treat drug or alcohol problems in the same way as any other health problem such as a back injury. The employee should be reassured that the system is confidential, fair and consistent and aimed to facilitate the employee returning to better health and productivity.

Evaluating Your Programme

Evaluation is an important part of any policy programme. Periodic evaluation lets you know if you are saving money and improving performance as well as providing valuable feedback on the welfare of your staff.

Here are some suggestions on the process:



For further information please contact:

KCA (UK) Workplace Services

Tel: 01474 326168 or email: kcawps@globalnet.co.uk

43A Windmill Street, Gravesend, Kent DA12 1BA

The SEEDA Social Dialogue Forum wishes to thank John Grace of KCA for his contribution to this publication.

Sources of Help / Advice:

South East Regional Drugs Team

Drug Team, Government Office for the South East,
Bridge House, 1 Walnut Tree Close, Guildford GU1 4GA
Tel: 01483 882445 www.drugs.gov.uk

Health and Safety Executive

HSE Infoline, Caerphilly Business Park, Caerphilly, CF83 3GG
Tel: 08701 545500 www.hse.gov.uk

Acas

Head Office, Brandon House,
180 Borough High Street, London SE1 1LW
Tel: 08457 474747 www.acas.org.uk

Employee Assistance Professionals Association

3 Moors Close, Ducklington, Witney, Oxfordshire OX29 7TW
Tel: 0800 783 7616 www.eapa.org.uk

Drugscope

32-36 Loman Street, London SE1 0EE
Tel: 020 7928 1211
Information and Library Services: 0870 774 3682
Email: info@drugscope.org.uk www.drugscope.org.uk

Alcohol Concern

Waterbridge House, 32-36 Loman Street, London SE1 0EE
Tel: 020 7928 7377 or Infoline Tel: 0207 922 8667
www.alcoholconcern.org.uk or
email: contact@alcoholconcern.org.uk
This organisation provides Drugs
and Alcohol Workplace Service leaflets.

Confederation of British Industry

Centre Point, 103 New Oxford Street, London WC1A 1DU
Tel: 020 7379 7400 www.cbi.org.uk

Trades Union Congress

Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1B 3LS
Tel: 020 7636 4030 www.tuc.org.uk

Health Development Agency

Greencoat House, 32 St Leonards Road, Eastbourne BN21 3UT
Tel: 01323 746320 www.hda-online.org.uk

Useful Publications:

National Drugs in the Workplace Initiative

CBI, TUC and Home Office, an employer and employee guide.
From KCA (UK) Workplace Services
43A Windmill Street, Gravesend, Kent DA12 1BA
Tel: 01474 326168 or email: kcawps@globalnet.co.uk

HSE "Don't mix it"

A guide for employers on alcohol at work. From HSE Books
PO Box 199, Sudbury, Suffolk CO10 2WA
Tel: 01787 881165 www.hsebooks.com

TUC "drunk or disordered"

A TUC guide to tackling alcohol and drugs at work.
From Trades Union Congress, Congress House,
Great Russell Street, London WC1B 3LS
Tel: 0207 636 4030 www.tuc.org.uk

In addition to those listed above, contacts, information
and advice are available from individual Trades Union and
Employer Organisations.



Contacts for the
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