

Workplace Paper

Number 2

ALCOHOL AND DRUGS



**Keenan
Research
Limited**

Victoria House 15 Gay Street Bath BA1 2PH

Tel: +44 (0) 1225 336569

E-mail: kmkeenan@keenan-research.com

Website: www.keenanresearch.com

ALCOHOL AND DRUG MISUSE IN THE WORKPLACE

Keenan Research Limited
Specialist Consultants in tackling work-related Alcohol and Drug problems

"Helping organisations to help themselves"

WHY IS ALCOHOL AND DRUGS MISUSE AN ISSUE?

Alcohol and drugs both affect the body's natural co-ordination and a person's ability to react to situations in the way in which it would in the absence of alcohol and drugs in the system. In short, both impair the body's ability to function fully efficiently.

Alcohol and drugs also cause accidents, lower work output and can significantly affect moods and behaviour. All of these substances can also lead to violent behaviour in the workplace.

In short, alcohol causes accidents by:



- ❑ Leading to over-confidence.
- ❑ Slowing down speed of reactions.
- ❑ Impairing co-ordination.
- ❑ Affecting balance.
- ❑ Impairing judgements of speed and distance.
- ❑ Provoking arguments, because non-verbal cues are interpreted negatively.

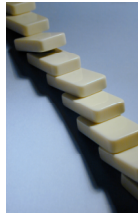
Similarly, drugs can lead to:



- ❑ Impaired performance at work.
- ❑ Loss of attentiveness (drowsiness and sleepiness).
- ❑ Personality changes.
- ❑ Mental health problems.
- ❑ Death from accidental overdoses.

In organisations which have a safety-critical responsibility, these are risks, which are unacceptable and need to be monitored and, if necessary, addressed proactively.

HOW WIDESPREAD IS THE MISUSE OF ALCOHOL AND DRUGS IN THE WORKPLACE?



Most recent figures show that nearly a third of all British adults have used illegal drugs or banned substances at some time in their lives.

It is also estimated that one in two young people have tried illegal drugs, particularly cannabis, at least once.

And about one in twenty people over the age of 18 have some level of alcohol problem, and many more regularly become intoxicated at levels that can, and will, impair judgement or their ability to carry out their job responsibilities fully effectively.

Some 2.9 million people are estimated to dependent on alcohol.

Both alcohol and drug misuse are commonplace and, whilst their abuse may take place outside the work environment, their effects are frequently manifest within it.

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS?



Figures compiled by the UK Department of Health show that conservatively some 5 million working days are lost through alcohol related illnesses, although the impact on the productivity of those who continue to work under the influence is more difficult to assess.

(Similar statistics are not collected for drugs misuse.)

Recent studies into statistics on road accidents, however, are beginning to indicate that the presence of illegal drugs, particularly cannabis, as a partial or primary cause of such accidents is far greater than had previously been recognised.

The influence of either alcohol or drugs on their own can be serious, but, in combination, they can have even more disastrous effects on both the individual concerned, as well as others working around them.

Furthermore, it is not only the increased predisposition to accidents or illness which drink and drugs create, but the potential for violence which can become a serious by-product of such misuse.

The effects on performance are not always immediately obvious, but they are insidious and eventually will affect the bottom line.

WHY SHOULD ORGANISATIONS BE CONCERNED?



There are a number of sound reasons why businesses and organisations should understand the issues raised by these problems and why they should be given much greater priority in many working environments.

These include:

- ❑ The impact on individual as well as group productivity.
- ❑ Higher levels of violence both inside and outside the workplace.
- ❑ The potential for increased incidence of breaches of discipline.
- ❑ The effects on customers and customer retention.
- ❑ The possible impact on employer's liability and third party liability.

These are just a few of the negative effects which alcohol and drug induced behavioural changes can have on the individual, the workgroup or team, management, customers and the community at large.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Whilst the extent of the problem within companies and organisations will vary widely and its identification or detection remains difficult, there are a number of steps which can be taken to start to alleviate latent problems.

These include three major strands:

- ❑ The development of a policy.
- ❑ The education of the workforce, both managers and staff.
- ❑ The human support of people who have problems relating to alcohol and drugs.

All three aspects are inter-connected and need to be tackled in a strategic and comprehensive way if most benefit is to be obtained in terms of increasing organisational productivity and enhancing human happiness.

HOW CAN ORGANISATIONS START TO ADDRESS THESE ISSUES?

If you are interested to ensure that any potential problem is recognised early and defused, getting in touch with us would help to provide a much clearer picture of whether there is a problem and how we might be able to do to assist.

We can discuss how we would work with you and what measures we could install to help you assess the effectiveness of any policy or programme you might want to initiate.

This would also give us the opportunity to illustrate to you, with real examples, how different problems have been tackled in other organisations and the positive impact they have had in resolving problems and rehabilitating people as effective working employees.



Helping people work better

Victoria House
15 Gay Street
Bath BA1 5ED

Tel: 01225 336569