

Drugs and alcohol in the workplace: additional guidance

Implementing a policy

An effective alcohol and drug policy potentially enhances the health, work capability and conduct of all people in the work environment. It can also help to ensure retention and employability of those experiencing, or who have experienced, alcohol or drug problems.

Your policy is a formal statement which sets out your organisation's procedures, including education and training, for helping employees with drug or alcohol related problems. An effective policy should also provide scope for supporting the manager and supervisors and workplace representatives in dealing with the complex and sensitive issues involved.

There is a responsibility placed on the employer and employees to ensure that risks within the workplace are kept to an absolute minimum for everyone. A clear policy can help reduce these risks and place you, as the employer, in a much better position should any incident or accident occur that is linked to the effects of drugs or alcohol.

The policy should be available to everyone. It should also be applied to all employees, regardless of status. As with any policy development it should reflect the partnership working between management and staff, and should be developed following a formal consultation process. The policy may also refer to other relevant policies such as those for health and safety or absence.

The drug and alcohol policy should clearly state:

- the rules about drug use in your organisation
- how issues will be dealt with
- what support will be offered
- when disciplinary action would be taken
- when the policy was created and when it will be reviewed
- a commitment to confidentiality.

Workplace drug and alcohol testing

The report of the Independent Inquiry into Drug Testing in the Workplace (IIDTW) stated that there can be a limited role for drug and alcohol testing in some circumstances, but drug testing at work is not a quick and easy fix. It is important to realise that it should not be used as a way of policing the behaviour of the workforce, nor should it be used as a tool for dealing with performance issues. A positive culture and effective management within an organisation are the most effective methods of achieving higher productivity, enhanced safety, low absence rates, low staff turnover and a reliable and responsible workforce.

Drug testing can have an important role in safety critical industries and other occupations where the public is entitled to expect especially high levels of integrity, safety and security.

What is drug and alcohol testing?

This is the term applied to chemical analysis of various biological specimens of a human to detect the presence of drugs, alcohol or their properties in the body.

Urine is the substance most commonly tested, but blood, saliva and hair can also be used for testing.

How would you test?

The results of any testing you carry out are legally defensible only if it can be proven that a correct chain of custody procedure has been followed in sending samples to the laboratory to ensure that it could not have been tampered with or mixed up with another sample.

When carrying out workplace and alcohol testing it is recommended that the laboratories that you engage with are accredited to test to the standards required by the UK Accreditation Service (UKAS).

When would you test?

Drug and alcohol testing can be used in a variety of different circumstances, for example:

- Pre-employment drug testing – can be part of the job selection process in some job roles.
- Transfer testing – when you move to a new job or are promoted within the company.
- Medical testing – as part of a routine company medical.
- Post-incident or accident testing – may take place following incidents or accidents where it is felt that the use of drugs or alcohol may have played a contributory factor.
- ‘With cause’ testing – where an employer has reasonable cause to believe an employee’s work performance is affected by the use of alcohol or drugs.
- Random testing – this is where a random selection of employees are tested. They are selected using a randomly generated list using unique identifiers such as employee pay number.
- Post-treatment testing – this is used to monitor an employee as part of an agreed programme of treatment.

For more advice on this topic contact our free and confidential **Adviceline** on **0800 019 2211** (option 1) or visit www.healthyworkinglives.com