

## Fit to Work and Impairment

# Alcohol Use and Work

Impairment (also known as unfit for duty/work) resulting from alcohol use can have severe consequences for not only the impaired worker, but also their co-workers, supervisor, and employer.

Employers must ensure that all of their employees are able to perform work safely. Impairment in the workplace due to alcohol consumption is a hazard that employers need to manage through policy and procedures.

### What is alcohol?

Produced from fermentation, alcohol is a liquid classified as a depressant drug. Consuming alcohol slows down the activity of a human's central nervous system and delays functions and reaction times between the brain and body.

### Risks of alcohol use in the workplace

Alcohol has been proven to impair judgment, which could lead to a person making decisions that could jeopardize their safety, the safety of others, and that of the surrounding environment.

Furthermore, the after-effects of excessive alcohol consumption (hangover, withdrawal) can cause temporary sickness and problems concentrating.

Alcohol consumption may have serious consequences for both long- and short-term users, including various health conditions, mental health problems, and risky behaviour. Long-term alcohol use has been linked to acute and chronic illnesses and diseases.

### How to identify alcoholism in the workplace

- Poor attendance record: a pattern of absence or unexplained absences, excessive use of sick leave, or often coming into work late.
- Risky behaviour: problems staying awake on the job, moving in an unbalanced manner, slurring speech, avoiding contact with supervisors, and poor attitude.
- Job performance problems: missing deadlines, poor work quality, low quantity in production, messy work station, unusual forgetfulness and lack of focus.
- Uncharacteristic behaviour: employee may start isolating themselves, be unprofessional and argumentative or easily irritated.

### Impacts of alcoholism in the workplace

- Employee safety: more accidents, increased workplace aggression/violence.
- Productivity problems: decrease in production, more errors.
- Employee health: increased use of sick time and health benefits.
- Employee morale: increased absences, causing a greater work load for co-workers, reducing team spirit and effort.
- Workplace security: theft, violence, harassment.
- Poor decision-making: distorted insight of own abilities, impaired judgment.
- Community relations: accidents, lawsuits and other incidents leading to reduced trust and business opportunities within the community.

