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.





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Workplace Roles and Responsibilities

EMPLOYER AND SUPERVISORS

Managers, supervisors, and human resources must address any concerns about impairment.

- Develop and implement an impairment policy and procedures that incorporate wellness training, impairment identification as well as appropriate assessment, treatment and rehabilitation for concerned employees.
- Be knowledgeable about the impairment policy.
- Communicate impairment policy and procedures and make them accessible to all employees.
- Document and report any incidents relating to alcoholism in the workplace according to policy.
- Consistently investigate any reports or suspicion of impairment in the workplace.
- Consistently apply disciplinary measures to any employee found to be in violation of the impairment policy.
- If requested, ensure the concerned employees are supplied with resources on where to access suitable counselling and support.
- Maintain the confidentiality of the concerned.

Sources

Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety, Substance Use in the Workplace

Workers' Compensation Board - Alberta, *Alcohol & Drugs in the Workplace*

Atlantic Canada Council on Addiction, *Problematic Substance* Use That Impacts the Workplace

WORKERS

- Participate in the training provided to identify and report any suspected impairment within the workplace.
- Report if you are using any prescribed medical treatment that may impair your performance.
- Communicate any problems you are experiencing with alcohol to your supervisor, or according to the company's policy.
- Follow impairment policies and procedures, including reporting suspected impairment.

JOINT OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE

- Ensures the employer develops and implements policies and procedures with managerial staff and employees.
- Periodically reviews all policies and procedures related to impairment in the workplace.
- Reviews and makes recommendations on policy and procedure revisions that will help minimize the risk associated with impairment.

Northwest Territories and Nunavut Safety Legislation

Occupational Health and Safety Regulations, Section 35.1, Impairment

Mine Health and Safety Regulations, Section 18.1.01 (NT), Impairment, and Section 18.02.1 (NU), Impairment



