



DRUG AND ALCOHOL MISUSE – A HOT TOPIC

Drug and alcohol misuse is a hot topic—and it can be a costly one. Proven to drastically reduce productivity in the workplace, substance misuse is thought to cost the UK economy billions of pounds a year.

Understanding of the implications of drug and alcohol misuse in the workplace is an important part of developing a robust and cost effective strategy for addressing the issues it can bring about. Early detection of any issues can also prevent more serious problems developing and save on mounting costs in the long term.

WHY IMPLEMENT A DRUG AND ALCOHOL TESTING POLICY?

Research by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2014, highlighted that drugs and alcohol are a contributory factor in 26% of the workplace accidents that cost the UK approximately £4bn a year.

Drug and alcohol misuse can seriously impair performance, productivity and affect the safety of employees. To comply with legal requirements, protect staff and the public drug and alcohol policies are becoming significantly more common in general industry.

Yet around a third of UK employers admit they don't have enough knowledge or training to identify if an employee is misusing drugs and alcohol even if they suspect this might be the case.

With 76% of people who misuse substances thought to be in regular employment, businesses are faced with very real risks and consequential effects in terms of safety, health and productivity.

CHANGING REGULATIONS

In 2015 the UK saw the introduction of tougher drug driving penalties for anyone caught driving under the influence of drugs— both illegal and some prescription.

Under the new drug drive legislation, people caught driving under the influence of drugs face harsher penalties, including up to six months imprisonment, a £5,000 fine and a minimum 1 year disqualification.

If an employee is found guilty of a road traffic offence such as driving, or being in charge of a vehicle, whilst under the influence of drink or drugs, under the Road Traffic Act 1988, the Traffic

Drug and alcohol testing policies – can you afford not to have one?



Commissioner is able to take disciplinary action against the operator. This includes anything from the complete revocation of a license, suspension in whole or in part, down to a formal warning for the operator concerned. In cases where a decision is made to revoke a license, the Commissioner also has the power to disqualify an operator or the directors of a limited company from holding or obtaining licenses for as long a period as they see fit.

The case may be judged more favourably by the Traffic Commissioner if the operator can demonstrate that they have a drug

and alcohol policy in place and that they have exercised all due diligence to prevent drug and alcohol misuse in the workplace.

SOLUTIONS FOR EMPLOYERS

To be most effective, employees need to understand and support their employers' rationale. Equally, they should have the benefits and effects of a policy to them as individuals, fully explained.

Guidance for employers looking to implement a policy is outlined below.

If you want more information on drug and alcohol testing and policy please email: marketing.uk@draeger.com.

SOLUTIONS

- Know the legal position—under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, employers have a duty to ensure a safe place of work and safe systems of work for staff.
- Policy communication between employers and employees is crucial, including guidance relating to testing for specific substances, testing of specific individuals, informed consent for testing and the consequences of refusing testing.
- Ensure that employees implementing the drug and alcohol policy are fully trained in the implications and know how to recognise the signs of potential misuse.
- Employers are permitted to use alcohol and drug testing at the recruitment stage and for testing current employees.
- Test results and advice must adhere to best medical practice and data protection protocols.
- It is important to recognise the work environment itself can contribute to levels of substance misuse, for example, high stress situations or periods of change. A full understanding of the complete picture is always important.
- Ideally, a drug and alcohol policy should be in place and agreed in advance of issues coming to light.
- A well written policy will cover how to handle people who come forward with their problems, allowing those seeking treatment to be treated with respect. It also means guidelines can be put in place as to how they could return to their former job after treatment or, if it was necessary for a change of job.