

## **MAJOR PROGRAM POINTS**

# **"DEALING WITH DRUG AND ALCOHOL ABUSE: FOR EMPLOYEES"**

**Part of the "GENERAL SAFETY SERIES"**

**Quality Safety and Health Products, for Today...and Tomorrow**

# **Outline of Major Points Covered in the "Dealing with Drug and Alcohol Abuse... for Employees" Course**

The following outline summarizes the major points of information presented in the course on "Dealing with Drug and Alcohol Abuse... for Employees". The outline can be used to survey the course before taking it on a computer, as well as to review the course when a computer is not available.

- **Most people have had too much to drink at least once in their lives.**
- **Unfortunately, people don't always recognize the danger of drinking alcohol... or using drugs.**
  - They start out thinking that they are in complete control... only to find themselves ruled by the substances that they use.
- **The term "substance abuse" can mean:**
  - The overuse of alcohol.
  - Misuse of over-the-counter medications and prescription drugs.
  - Use of illegal drugs.
  - "Huffing" chemicals that produce noxious vapors, such as solvents, lighter fluid and glue.
  - Eating "magic mushrooms" and other toxic plants.
- **Substances that produce a "high" affect how the central nervous system functions.**
  - Depressants, such as alcohol, marijuana and tranquilizers, slow down brain activity.
  - Stimulants, including cocaine, crack and methamphetamine, speed it up.
  - Narcotic analgesics, such as heroin, morphine and OxyContin numb the senses.
  - Hallucinogens like LSD alter the way that the brain processes information.

- **Some drugs can affect users in multiple ways.**
  - Ecstasy, for instance, is both a stimulant and a hallucinogen.
- **A substance abuser's personality and ability to function is directly affected by the drugs that they take.**
  - For instance, when someone is high on cocaine or other stimulants, they are often overconfident, hyperactive... even reckless.
- **In the workplace, a person who has been using these substances has a significantly increased risk of having an accident.**
  - They tend to act impulsively and take chances that a "normal" person would not.
- **On the other hand, alcohol, marijuana and other depressants are dangerous because of their strong "sedating effect."**
  - Even at low doses, depressants can severely impair a person's reaction time and make it difficult for them to think clearly.
- **Since people frequently feel "good" when they are under the influence of alcohol and drugs, they often don't recognize that they are dangerous... to themselves and others.**
- **The "residual" effect of a substance can cause a person to have an accident hours or even days after they last used it.**
  - This makes substance abuse unique in terms of workplace safety, because what a substance abuser does on their "own time" can still affect them at work.
- **When people think of substance abuse, they often picture an addict living on the street.**
  - But the fact is that most abusers have jobs.
  - They are frequently able to conceal their problem from their employers, coworkers and even their families.

- **Alcohol is by far the most commonly abused of all drugs.**
  - In the United States alone there are over 50 million binge drinkers.
  - Nearly half of all serious workplace accidents are caused by people drinking on the job.
  - And 25,000 people die each year in alcohol-related vehicle crashes!
  
- **Impairment starts with the first drink!**
  - And after only a few drinks it's extremely unsafe to operate vehicles or machinery of any type.
  
- **A person who is drunk may act irrationally, have emotional outbursts... even become violent.**
  - Although no one should be allowed behind the wheel while they are intoxicated, it may not be safe for you to try and get their keys.
  - Notify your supervisor if a coworker who appears to be under the influence is attempting to drive (call the police if you are not on the job).
  
- **Marijuana is the most commonly used illegal drug, and is second only to alcohol in its frequency of abuse.**
  
- **Like alcohol, marijuana is a depressant. This makes it unsafe for a user to be working because marijuana:**
  - Impairs short-term memory.
  - Reduces the ability to concentrate.
  - Affects coordination.
  - Slows reaction time.
  
- **As with most illegal drugs, marijuana has a cumulative effect. Over time, heavy users:**
  - Develop a noticeable reduction in their ability to function safely.
  - Tend to lose ambition.
  - Often suffer from paranoia.
  - Develop negative personality traits that can hurt their chances for career advancement.

- **People who smoke marijuana often drink alcohol to increase the "high."**
  - When a person is "doubly impaired" they are much more likely to be involved in an accident.
- **Combining drugs can also lead to an overdose.**
  - For instance, consuming alcohol with strong depressants, such as barbiturates and tranquilizers, can be fatal.
- **In the workplace, the most commonly overlooked depressants are the chemicals that you may use every day.**
  - Breathing in fumes from aerosol cans, glue or gasoline can cause immediate, irreversible damage to your brain, lungs and respiratory tract.
  - You have to be especially careful when working around these substances, because it can be easy to "get hooked" on the vapors and not even know it.
- **Even when the negative effects of a substance are well known, some people are still drawn to them.**
  - Illegal stimulants, such as cocaine, crack (a concentrated form of cocaine) and methamphetamine, as well as narcotic analgesics like heroin, are all extremely addictive, dangerous drugs with terrible side-effects.
- **Crystal meth (methamphetamine), for example, is made from highly toxic materials, including anhydrous ammonia, red phosphorus and lithium from old batteries.**
  - This mixture is so powerful and corrosive that people who routinely smoke it have had their teeth disintegrate.

- **Contrary to popular belief, most "hard drug" users manage to hold down jobs... and for a while they may even excel at them.**
  - For instance, someone who uses crystal meth may have a tremendous amount of energy that they put into their work.
  - But they also lose the ability to think rationally and act safely.
- **Illegal stimulants and narcotics can impair a person to such a degree that they become a walking time-bomb.**
  - Unless they are able to clean up their act, they are likely to end up in jail, a mental institution or an early grave.
- **In recent years it has become very popular to abuse prescription and over-the-counter medications on the job.**
  - Unfortunately, many people don't recognize the danger of getting high on these substances.
  - They wrongly presume that... "Since it's a medicine, it must be fairly safe."
- **But medication abuse can be just as addictive, and even more deadly, than using illegal drugs.**
  - In fact, with some pain relievers only one pill can cause complete respiratory failure.
- **Commonly abused prescription drugs include:**
  - Stimulants such as amphetamines and Ritalin.
  - Narcotic analgesics, such as OxyContin and medications containing codeine.
- **Some people even use over-the-counter medicines, such as cough syrup containing dextromethorphan (DXM), to get high.**
- **One drug that is almost never used on the job is the powerful hallucinogen LSD.**
  - However, a person who has used LSD can be a serious workplace hazard, since they could have "flashbacks" at anytime, even many years after they last took the drug.

- **Substance abuse of any kind is dangerous. It can:**
  - Take away a person's job, savings, friends and family.
  - Put them in jail.
  - Destroy their health.
  - Cause severe mental problems.
  - Even kill them.
  
- **Worst of all, what a substance abuser does while under the influence can endanger coworkers and anyone else that they come into contact with.**
  
- **The risks are obvious, yet intelligent people continually allow themselves to "get hooked." But why?**
  - Few people set out to become substance abusers.
  - Most alcoholics start as casual drinkers.
  - Many hard drug users get hooked through experimentation.
  
- **People who are addicted to medications may even consider themselves "teetotalers," because they don't drink alcohol or use illegal drugs.**
  
- **Stress, depression, anxiety and personal tragedy can all drive a person to use alcohol or drugs... to help them "escape" from their problems.**
  - Chronic physical pain and mental illness can also lead a person to "self-medicate."
  
- **People are particularly vulnerable to becoming substance abusers when they go through traumatic events.**
  - Deaths in the family, broken relationships, getting laid-off and serious financial difficulties are just a few of the things that can start a person drinking excessively or using drugs.
  
- **It is absolutely critical that you don't use alcohol or drugs to "help" you deal with your problems.**
  - They aren't the solution.
  - Alcohol and drugs will only make the situation worse... much worse!

- **A "heavy user" can build up a tolerance to alcohol and most drugs.**
  - Eventually their body gets used to taking a substance, and a lot more of it is required to get the same effect that a small dose once had.
  
- **When someone has built up a tolerance to alcohol or drugs it is easy for them to believe that they are in control of their substance use.**
  - But tolerance is actually a warning sign that a person is becoming alcohol or drug-dependent.
  
- **"Psychological dependence" comes first. This is when someone can't help wanting a substance.**
  - It increasingly becomes the focus of their lives, overshadowing their family, friends, job, health and safety.
  
- **"Physical dependence" occurs further down the road. It is even more serious, because the person's body becomes "addicted" to the substance.**
  - At this point a person has no choice in using the drug.
  - If they don't get their daily "fix" they will go through traumatic withdrawal symptoms.
  
- **Any substance can cause a psychological dependence, while physical dependence is more likely to occur with certain types of drugs, such as cocaine, heroin, prescription pain relievers and alcohol.**
  
- **People who have developed a dependency are often in complete denial.**
  - They can't see what is obvious to the people around them.
  
- **If anyone... a friend, family member or coworker expresses concern over your alcohol or drug use, listen to them.**
  - It's all too easy to cross the line from substance use to dependency and not even know it.

- **When it comes to substance abuse, prevention is the best medicine.**
  - You have to monitor your behavior and honestly ask yourself the question... "Could I become a substance abuser?"
  
- **Substance abuse can sneak up on you. So you need to keep away from dangerous behaviors.**
  - Never use illegal drugs.
  - Only take prescription medicines that have been prescribed by a reputable doctor.
  - Follow the directions for all of the medications that you use.
  
- **If you drink, do it in moderation.**
  - Be aware of binge drinking! (some people go all year long without a drink, just to get "smashed" on New Years Eve).
  
- **It's also important to remember that addiction to alcohol and drugs is a disease.**
  - Like many illnesses, a person's heredity can play a part.
  - If there is a history of substance abuse in your family, you must be especially careful.
  
- **There are no known cures for alcoholism and drug addiction.**
  - With effort, and help from others, a person can stop their harmful behaviors, but they never truly "recover" from their addiction.
  - A sip of beer or a hit off a joint is all it can take to send someone back to a vicious cycle of self-destruction.
  
- **Keeping substance abuse out of the workplace should be a top priority for all companies.**
  - Even moderate drinkers and occasional drug users can be dangerous if they show up for work "under the influence."

- **Workers are expected to be completely sober and drug-free when they report for work.**
  - And they must remain that way throughout their shift.
- **They should also adhere to the company's drug and alcohol policy when they are:**
  - Representing the company at social gatherings.
  - Attending company sponsored recreational events.
  - "On call" or awaiting assignment.
- **In addition to listing behaviors to avoid, your company's drug and alcohol policy will outline the steps that you should take if you are having a substance abuse problem.**
  - It will also contain information on what you should do if you suspect that a coworker may be under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
  - Remember, keeping quiet about substance abuse in the workplace is dangerous!
- **When substance abuse is brought to management's attention, the company will investigate the situation.**
  - Workers who are suspected of being under the influence will immediately be removed from any tasks that could endanger themselves or others.
  - They will then be interviewed by someone who is trained to recognize and deal with substance abuse problems.
- **When confronted, some substance abusers immediately ask for help.**
  - But if a suspected abuser denies that they are under the influence, a "reasonable suspicion" alcohol or drug test can be given.
- **A company can also perform periodic alcohol and drug tests to uncover substance abuse problems that might otherwise go unnoticed.**
  - Government regulations require random substance abuse tests for truck drivers, pilots and other transportation industry employees who have "safety-sensitive" jobs.

- **Failing a substance abuse test will not necessarily result in disciplinary action.**
  - However, the employee will normally be required to enter an alcohol or drug rehabilitation program.
- **When an employee has a substance abuse problem, the situation will typically be handled like any other serious illness.**
  - A leave of absence can often be arranged.
  - In some cases the employee can be assigned alternate work while they are rehabilitating.
- **Your company's objective is to keep everyone safe by ridding your facility of substance abuse, not people.**
  - In most cases only those who refuse treatment or have caused a serious accident will face suspension or termination.
- **Some companies have "Employee Assistance Programs" (EAPs) that offer resources to help workers combat substance abuse problems.**
- **You can also help a coworker overcome substance abuse by being understanding and encouraging their rehabilitation efforts.**
  - People who are trying to recover from drug or alcohol abuse need as much support as they can get... from family, friends and coworkers.
- **It is also crucial for them to seek help from people who have been down the road of addiction themselves, and found another path to follow.**
  - That's why groups like Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous are so important.

**\*\*\* SUMMARY \*\*\***

- **An employee who is under the influence of drugs or alcohol is dangerous to themselves, their coworkers and anyone else who is around them.**
  - So to prevent accidents, your company needs your help to keep substance abuse out of the workplace.
- **Never underestimate the danger of alcohol and drugs.**
- **Know your company's drug and alcohol policy... and follow it.**
- **Learn to recognize the signs of substance abuse.**
- **Inform your supervisor immediately if you suspect a coworker is "under the influence."**
- **If you drink, do so in moderation... and don't drive.**
- **Use proper respiratory protection when working with "inhalants."**
- **Never use illegal drugs.**
- **Follow the directions for all of the medications that you take.**
- **And support people who are trying to recover from substance abuse problems.**
- **Drugs and alcohol have a devastating effect on the lives of millions of abusers... and the people around them. By helping to keep substance abuse out of your facility, you can make it a safer... and a better... place to work!**