

Drug-free Workplace Programs

There is no denying the adverse effects of drugs and alcohol in the workplace. Of the 12.3 million current adult illicit drug users, 77% or 9.4 million work, according to U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) statistics. That same organization reports an estimated 6.5% of full-time and 8.6% of part-time workers are illicit drug users, and the Hazeldon Foundation's "Addiction in the Workplace Survey" says that more than 60% of adults know someone who has reported for work under the influence of alcohol or other drugs.

What does all this mean? It means lost revenue and increased costs. Each year, alcohol and drug abuse cost American businesses roughly \$100 billion in lost productivity, according to the Drugfree America Foundation, Inc. Because substance abuse affects all industries to some degree, any given company can expect to lose revenue due to one or more of the following:

- Absenteeism: Drug-using employees claim an average of three times more sick days than non-users.
- Tardiness: Drug-using employees are late to work three times more often than non-users.
- Accidents: Drug-using employees experience 3.6 times more job-related accidents than non-users.
- Insurance Costs: Drug-using employees file five times more workers' compensation claims than non-users.
- Productivity: Drug-using employees are only two-thirds as productive as non-users. (Drug-free America Foundation, Inc. statistics)

Helpful Legislation

Anti-drug regulations mandated by the Department of Defense (DOD), the Department of Transportation (DOT) and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) have steered industries falling under their jurisdiction toward establishing drug-free work environments. Even some state workers' compensation insurance programs, including Arizona's, offer money-saving incentives to employers with drug testing programs. Here, you can save at least 5%, sometimes more, on workers' compensation insurance if your company has a drug-testing program.

Other legislation, like the Drug-free Workplace Act of 1988, fosters state support for drug-free workplace programs by providing tax, insurance and legislative incentives. The Act also allows the U.S. Small Business Administration to award grants to qualified intermediaries to provide technical and financial assistance to qualifying small and medium-sized businesses setting up drug-free workplace programs. Free drug testing services may also be available to qualifying businesses.

Other Incentives for Small and Mid-sized Businesses

These and other incentives make it possible for many small to mid-sized businesses, once afraid of cost, to establish drug-free workplace programs of their own. "Small businesses are particularly vulnerable when it comes to the adverse effects of drug use in the workplace," says Director of H.R. Services Cindy Jones, SPHR, of SYNERGY SEVEN, Inc., an Arizona-based human resources consulting firm. "When it comes to workplace substance abuse, small businesses have a huge disadvantage. Because they are less likely to have drug-free workplace programs in place, so they become the favored employer of drug-users. Businesses, even small ones, that don't jump on the drug-free bandwagon, must endure these consequences. If large corporations and government contractors are hiring drug-free job candidates, whom are you recruiting?"

"Another factor facing small businesses without drug-testing programs is safety. Statistics show that keeping drugs out of the workplace improves safety and reduces liability. The opposite is also true, so small enterprises with limited financial reserves could face a catastrophic financial loss should an employee cause a job-related accident or injury while impaired."

Statistics from SAMHSA bring more alarming news: Of current full-time employees who are also illicit drug users,
... 44 percent work for small establishments (1-24 employees).
... 43 percent work for medium establishments (25-499 employees).
... only 13 percent work for large establishments (500 or more employees).

How Important Is Drug Testing?

Clearly, drug testing is the most effective way to deter workers from illicit drug use. According to Jones, drug testing is a critical part of any drug-free workplace program, particularly if your business involves manufacturing or production work where safety is an issue.

"There are all kinds of testing facilities to make drug testing easy," she says. "Usually, independent laboratories are contracted to ensure accuracy and protect the privacy of those being tested." Detecting alcohol or controlled substances is done by collecting breath, blood, urine, saliva or hair samples. The lab then identifies and evaluates each sample, being careful to prevent contamination. "New provisions under the Health Insurance Portability & Accountability Act's (HIPAA's) Privacy Rule require that all medical information, including drug test results, be kept confidential," Jones says. "This provides an even greater impetus to outsource testing. Working with an independent lab helps protect the confidentiality of your employees' medical information."

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