

WHS UNIT

ALCOHOL AND DRUGS IN EMPLOYMENT – GUIDE FOR SUPERVISORS

1. BACKGROUND

The University has a requirement to provide adequate supervision with relation to the implementation of WHS policies and procedures in the workplace. This guide provides advice for supervisors on how to discharge their responsibilities as outlined in the University's [Alcohol and Drugs in the Workplace Policy](#).

2. GENERAL

With regards to supervising compliance of employees with the requirements of the University's Alcohol and Drugs in the Workplace Policy the following list provides practical suggestions for supervisors to demonstrate due diligence:

- Inform all employees of what is expected of them in terms of performance. Be alert to changes in performance and changes in patterns of attendance. Record such changes in consultation with employees.
- Be aware of the type of things that **may** indicate that alcohol and/or drug use **could** be a problem including:
 - (i) Absenteeism:
 - Multiple instances of unauthorised leave
 - Excessive sick leave; or use of multiple types of leave in excessive amounts
 - Frequent Monday and/or Friday absences
 - Excessive tardiness, especially on Monday mornings or in returning from lunch;
 - Leaving work early
 - Peculiar and increasingly improbable excuses for absences
 - Higher absenteeism rate than other employees for colds, flu, gastritis, etc
 - "On-the-Job" Absenteeism i.e. continued absences from post more than job requires.
 - (ii) High Accident Rate
 - Accidents on the job
 - Accidents off the job (but affecting job performance).
 - (iii) Difficulty in Concentration
 - Work requires greater effort
 - Jobs take more time.
 - (iv) Confusion
 - Difficulty in recalling instructions, details, etc
 - Increasing difficulty in handling complex assignments
 - Difficulty in recalling own mistakes.
 - (v) Spasmodic Work Patterns
 - Alternate periods of high and low productivity.

- (vi) Generally Lowered Job Efficiency
 - missed deadlines;
 - mistakes due to non-attention or poor judgment;
 - wasting more material
 - making bad decisions
 - complaints from users of services or products
 - Improbable excuses for poor job performance.
 - (vii) Poor Employee Relationships on the Job
 - Over-reaction to real or imagined criticism
 - Wide swings in morale
 - Borrowing money from co-workers
 - Complaints from co-workers
 - Unreasonable resentments
 - Avoidance of associates.
- Be prepared to discuss the performance problem with the employee. Use the documentation you have prepared to set guidelines for improving work performance. If the performance problems continue, suggest referral for professional counselling or medical assessment.
 - Be willing to recognise when you are beyond your area of expertise with an employee's problem. Contact the WHS Unit or P&C Operations.

3. DO'S AND DON'TS FOR THE SUPERVISOR

Do's:

- DO remember that alcohol and drug problems can be progressive - they usually get worse, without some intervention.
- DO take immediate action if you are concerned about the ability of an employee to perform their job. This may include removing them from duty, contacting the WHS Unit or P&C Operations, and ensuring that the employee has safe transport home.
- DO point out that the University Counselling Services is an employee benefit, and that help is possible and available.
- DO explain that employees must decide for themselves whether to seek assistance.
- DO emphasise that all aspects of the program are completely confidential.
- DO focus on job performance.
- DO refer the matter to the Manager WHS or WHS Unit for assistance.

Don'ts:

- DON'T attempt to diagnose.
- DON'T debate the personal problem. Point out that the University Counselling Services, University Health Services or community agencies will help deal with any personal problems.
- DON'T feel sorry for the employee or cover for him/her. It may lead to problems that are more serious in the future.
- DON'T discuss drinking or drug use unless it occurs on the job.
- DON'T moralise. Restrict criticism to job performance or attendance.
- DON'T "cover up" for a friend. Your "misguided kindness" can lead to a serious delay in real help reaching them.

Some questions to ask yourself:

- Have I spoken with the employee about this performance problem before?
- Is the employee clear as to what is expected of them concerning performance and attendance?
- Have I documented the problem?
- Have I documented past attempts to deal with the problem?
- Have I given the employee the chance to correct the problem through normal procedures?
- Am I out of my field? (Am I attempting to diagnose an illness, be a psychiatrist, psychologist, etc?)

Remember, document all problems documentation is a necessary element of problem solving.

4. APPROACHING AN EMPLOYEE UNDER THE INFLUENCE

The following should be considered when approaching a person who appears to be affected by alcohol or other drugs:

- Care must be taken when making this kind of judgement, in case the worker is ill or injured, taking prescribed medications or in some other form of distress, which may account for their behaviour.
- When approaching an affected employee it can be more effective and less confronting to talk in terms of their approach to safety and general work performance, rather than challenge their drug or alcohol use.
- Should the initial contact produce a negative or hostile response, the supervisor should assess the situation and determine the risk of possible injury due to the employee's behaviour. If necessary UOW Security may need to be contacted in an extreme situation.
- Where legitimate medication is the cause of unsafe performance the employee will need to see their general practitioner for a medication review.
- Employees who have a problem are to be provided with the opportunity to seek help and assistance, the same as any other sick or injured employee.

5. ORGANISING AN EVENT WHICH INCLUDES THE SERVICE OF ALCOHOL

To ensure compliance with the Policy on Alcohol and Drugs in Employment the following steps should be followed when organising an event involving alcohol:

- Step 1: Ensure each person is aware and familiar with the Policy. Discuss with your staff the purpose, principles and responsibilities arising from the Policy, as employees of the University.
- Step 2: Carry out supervision of staff and observe employee behaviour to ensure adherence with the Policy.
- Step 3: Address any concerns or issues proactively to ensure all employees' health and safety. Provide support to employees where appropriate.

Planning is a key element in ensuring that any event is a success. Conducting a [risk assessment](#) to identify the potential issues in relation to alcohol is the best way to ensure a successful, incident free event. Firstly, gain approval from the Dean/Director. Think about who will be attending, how many people will be attending the event, organize food and drink for the occasion.

Refer to the [Guidelines on the Use and Management of Alcohol at University Functions](#), especially *Table 1: Risk Criteria for Events Serving Alcohol* and *Appendix 1 - Guidelines for the Responsible Service and Consumption of Alcohol* to assess the risk level of the event and promote a balanced approach to the consumption of alcohol.

Further information can be obtained from the following sources:

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| WHS Unit | 42213931 |
| Manager WHS | 4221 3204 |
| Manager P&C Operations | 4221 5668 |
| Employee Assistance Program | 1300 361 008 |

6. Version Control Table

| Version Control | Date Released | Approved By | Amendment |
|-----------------|----------------|-------------|--|
| 1 | September 2007 | WHS Manager | Document created. |
| 2 | August 2010 | WHS Manager | Document updated to incorporate the Personnel name change to Human Resources Division. |
| 3 | April 2012 | WHS Manager | Rebrand |
| 4 | May 2013 | WHS Manager | Legislative name change |
| 5 | November 2013 | WHS Manager | Scheduled Review – no significant changes |
| 6 | November 2023 | WHS Manager | Scheduled review. Rebrand. Fixed broken links. Minor update. |