



# DrugFree@WorkPlace

## Health and Safety in the Workplace

Workplace accidents and deaths are costly to everyone, and not just in financial costs. It is impossible to estimate the full value of the quality of life lost to work-related injuries and illnesses. But at a cost of more than \$180 billion a year nationwide, the direct and indirect costs are at least equal to that of cancer. This is a tragic fact because almost all workplace accidents are preventable.

Employees have a right to work in a safe, drug-free work environment and the responsibility for this is primarily on the employer. However, both employers *and* employees have a legal obligation to work together to improve health and safety at work.

Employees appreciate safe working environments and know that this is a sign of their employer caring about employee welfare and wellbeing. Business owners and managers know that workers who care about workplace safety are safer and healthier than those who do not. Every employer and employee should be aware of all issues that affect health and safety in the workplace, and this includes substance abuse at work.

## Employee Responsibilities

Employees are responsible for taking care of their own health and safety and that of clients, customers, and coworkers who may be affected by what they do (or do not do). A good employee cooperates with the company and others on health and safety and does not violate or interfere with company policies and procedures.

Employees should always follow the training they have received when using any tools or equipment provided by the employer, and tell someone (the owner of the company, a supervisor, human resource manager, or safety director) if they think inadequate precautions are putting anyone's health and safety at serious risk. In the same way, employees should notify their supervisor or HR if they have reason to believe a coworker is impaired on the job.

## Employer Responsibilities

Workplace health and safety is about keeping employees from getting injured at work, or sick as a result of an unsafe or unhealthy workplace. Conscientious employers implement and maintain drug free workplace and other safety programs. They make sure to inform employees about risks to health and safety from current or proposed working practices, and about changes that may harm or affect employee's health and safety.

Responsible employers make sure that employees know how to do the job safely, what is done to protect worker's health and welfare, how to get first-aid treatment, and what to do in an emergency. Smart employers understand that employees who feel safe in their work environment are able to work more productively and everyone benefits.

## Workplace Safety Programs

Caring employers always put safety programs such as drug free workplace and violence prevention measures in place. These programs are important in helping to reduce drug and alcohol related crime and violence in the workplace, and to help ensure a safe and accident-free work environment. A drug-free workplace policy with enforceable consequences for

disregarding the policy contributes to a safe workplace, because others' behavior affects the safety of fellow workers.

Responsible employers recognize that impairment by drug or alcohol use constitutes an avoidable workplace hazard and that drug-free workplace programs help improve worker safety and health and add value to the business.

Employers and supervisors have a right and a responsibility to protect their organizations from alcohol and drug abuse by educating employees about its dangers and encouraging individuals with alcohol and drug problems to seek help. Drug free workplace programs are also natural compliments to other initiatives that help ensure safe and healthy workplaces and add value to America's businesses and communities.

Safer workplaces mean informed and aware workers are given opportunities to discuss their health and safety and raise concerns when necessary. In fact, it is against federal law for an employer to fire, demote, transfer, or otherwise retaliate against a worker who complains about unsafe working conditions and uses their legal rights.

The time to care about workplace safety is *before* someone gets hurt. If you have concerns regarding safety, including drug or alcohol abuse in the workplace, please contact your supervisor immediately.

***The following information is provided by the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health & Developmental Disabilities.***

### **#StopTheStigma**

In 2017 the hashtag #MeToo was used to shine a light on sexual abuse and sexual harassment against women. In 2020 the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter took the world by storm. Today's younger generations and

social media activists have not been shy about making big waves for social change.

There is another movement of social change that we would like to see, and that is to #StopTheStigma.

Even in 2021 there is still a lot of fear, shame, and misunderstanding around the subject of mental health or mental health challenges. This stigma often prevents people from speaking out and getting the help they need when they are struggling, even if their problems are a normal part of human life and even if their problems are a temporary experience.

The COVID-19 pandemic has opened our eyes to the common need for mental health support. Almost everyone has experienced anger, sadness, fear, worry, grief, and other negative emotional and mental states during this time. Relationship problems happen. Sometimes we need help getting sober. The loss of income and jobs, anger about school closures and politics, the fear of getting sick or losing loved ones—this pandemic has impacted all of us.

Mental health is as important as our physical health, and it is time that we support each other and normalize getting extra support when life gets hard. There is absolutely no shame in working to become healthier in all areas of our lives, including our mental health. We all deal with mental and emotional struggles, and we can all recover!

To learn more about suicide prevention, visit the DBHDD website at:  
<https://dbhdd.georgia.gov/suicide-prevention>.

Or contact the Suicide Prevention Director, Rachael Holloman, at:  
[rachael.holloman@dbhdd.ga.gov](mailto:rachael.holloman@dbhdd.ga.gov).

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:**  
1-800-273-TALK (8255).