



# DrugFree@WorkPlace

As an employee of a company with a certified drug free workplace program, it is important for you to understand the reasons the business you work for chose to become drug free.

## Reasons for a Drug Free Workplace

Why do employers choose to implement drug free workplace programs and drug test their workers? Many companies are drug free to comply with state or federal laws and regulations, but also because business owners know that drug free workplace programs that include drug testing are in the company and the employees' best interest.

The U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Organization (OSHA) General Duty Clause Section 5(a)(1) requires that employers maintain a workplace that is free of hazards. Companies that are in violation of this regulation are subject to citations and fines. OSHA has identified drug and alcohol use in the workplace as a workplace hazard and the agency strongly supports measures that contribute to a drug free environment and programs of drug testing within a comprehensive workplace program.

The U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) also requires drug free workplace programs and drug testing for many companies. For example, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA), a division of DOT, requires that persons subject to commercial driver's license (CDL) requirements and their employers follow alcohol and drug testing rules.

In addition to OSHA and DOT requirements, the federal Drug Free

Workplace Act requires many federal contractors and all federal grantees to provide drug free workplace programs as a precondition of receiving a federal grant or contract. Each individual state also has its own Drug Free Workplace Act that requires companies that do business with the state to have drug free workplace programs in place.

While many state and federal laws require drug free workplace programs and drug testing of employees, the answer employers give most often when asked why their company is drug free, is safety. People who abuse drugs or alcohol are a much greater danger to themselves and to others than those who do not. Employers know that a large number of workplace fatalities involve drug or alcohol abuse. Alcohol and drug abuse creates significant safety and health hazards and can result in decreased productivity and poor employee morale. It also can lead to additional costs in the form of health care claims, especially short-term disability claims, and to increased legal liability for a company.

Another reason employers decide to drug test their employees is that workers compensation insurance claims alone can be devastating to a small business. On average, it can cost up to \$75,000 to treat a back injury. If an employee at the company you work for hurts their back, and your employer's insurance company must pay the injury claim, what do you suppose will happen to your company's insurance premiums? They will go up drastically of course! In many states however, if an employee tests positive for drugs within 8 hours of an accident, or positive for alcohol within 3 hours of an accident, the employer will not be held responsible for the claim. This means if an employee has an accident as a result

of being under the influence of drugs or alcohol, the company will not be held responsible for the medical costs, the employee will.

Some other reasons that employers decide to have a drug free workplace are to deter employees from abusing drugs or alcohol and to prevent hiring individuals who use illegal drugs. Managers and supervisors want to be able to identify early, and appropriately refer employees who have drug or alcohol problems to treatment so that they can get well and get back to work. This is why supervisor training is such an important part of a comprehensive drug free workplace program.

Employers also adopt drug free workplace programs to protect the general public and to instill client and customer confidence that employees at the company are working safely. It is important for all employees to support the company drug free workplace program.

### **Don't Enable Drug Abusing Coworkers!**

Too often, family, friends, and coworkers can unwittingly become "enablers" to a drug or alcohol abuser—that is, they can shield and protect the abuser from experiencing the full impact of the consequences of abuse. For example, a family member might call in to work to report that someone is sick when the real problem is a hangover. A coworker might cover up for an abuser's mistakes or might do part of the abuser's work for him. A friend might laugh at a person's account of his or her weekend binge, rather than expressing concern and pointing out the problem. These are all examples of "enabling" behavior.

Substance abusers often need to "hit bottom" or experience the painful consequences of their behavior before they decide to seek help. Those close to substance abusers can help most by refusing to make excuses for, cover up for, or protect the abuser, and by

expressing concern and suggesting professional help.

What is the difference between helping and enabling? There are many opinions and viewpoints on this, but here is a simple description:

**Helping** is doing something for someone that they are not capable of doing themselves.

**Enabling** is doing for someone things that they could and *should* be doing themselves. Simply, enabling creates an atmosphere in which the drug abuser or alcoholic can comfortably continue his unacceptable behavior.

### **Are you an enabler?**

Here's a few questions that might help determine the difference between helping and enabling a substance abusing person:

1. Have you ever called in sick for the abuser, lying about his/her symptoms?
2. Have you accepted part of the blame for his (or her) drinking or drug use?
3. Have you avoided talking about his drug use out of fear of his response?
4. Have you bailed him out of jail or paid for his legal fees? Have you paid bills that he was supposed to have paid himself? Have you loaned him money?
5. Have you tried drinking with him in hopes of strengthening the relationship?
6. Have you given him "one more chance" and then another and another?
7. Have you threatened to leave and didn't?
8. Have you finished a job or project that the user failed to complete himself?

Of course, if you answered "yes" to any of these questions, you at some point in time have enabled the substance abuser to avoid his own responsibilities.