



Supervisor Newsletter

Supervisors: The Most Critical Drug Free Workplace Component

The United States is in an ever increasingly competitive environment where companies are no longer only concerned with competitors in the U.S, but must also be concerned with those from foreign countries where labor is inexpensive and plentiful.

The pressure on supervisors and their organizations to provide the best, most cost-effective products and services possible has never been greater. One way to help accomplish this task is to do everything possible to provide efficiencies and savings by ensuring that the drug free workplace program is utilized to its fullest potential.

When one considers that 15.9 million Americans say they are “heavy” drinkers, and that (according to a survey reported by the Department of Labor and conducted by the Hazelden Foundation) more than 60% of employees say they have personal knowledge of a coworker’s actual drug use on the job, the importance of enforcing company substance abuse policies becomes evident. It is important that all members of the management team fully support the company drug free workplace program from the president of the company to the front-line supervisor.

Front-line supervisors are especially important in that they are the ones closest to the employees directly responsible for producing the organization’s goods and services. More than anyone else in the organization, they are in a position to recognize changes in an employee’s job performance. Nowhere else, at any level, is more expected or performance more critical.

Saving Costs and Reducing Problems

The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), reports that 77% of drug users are employed. Broken down, that means that 42,000 employees go to work stoned on a daily basis, or are getting high while on the job. According to other government reports, 120 million Americans are current alcohol users—that’s 51% of the current population. Almost 45% of that number, or 54 million, admit to being what is referred to as “binge” drinkers. Considering these statistics, how much can supervisors help their companies save by eliminating—or reducing—substance abuse in the workplace? The factors that play into calculating the dollar number include drug abuse related illnesses, accidents, absences, workers’ compensation claims, tardiness, redoing and rejected products, incarceration, increased sick leave usage, and medical benefits.

Consider missed workdays or absences alone. The Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP) estimates that 500 million workdays are lost annually to alcoholism. Conservatively, if we were dealing with only 10% of that lost workday estimate, and the average worker was only paid \$65 per day, that single number itself would be more than \$3.25 billion dollars. With that in mind, it is easy to understand why costs of substance abuse are estimated to be in the hundreds of billions of dollars annually.

Supervisor Support

It is essential that upper level management understand and accept the importance of supervision as a tool for implementing and maintaining the drug free workplace program, recognizing that front-line supervisors are the best judge of employee performance.

Because an important responsibility of supervisors is to observe and evaluate employee job performance, they can be effective advocates for employees. They can encourage employees to deal with work related problems that may or may not be connected with alcohol or other drug use. They also can suggest sources of help and support—such as an employee assistance program (EAP) or local treatment program—when an employee has problems. Without informed, well-trained, committed managers and supervisors, however, this cannot be accomplished.

Supervisor Training

Proper supervisor training is critical to the success of any drug free workplace program. In most states, supervisor training can be conducted in a variety of ways depending on resources available:

- In-Person Presentations. The Council on Alcohol and Drugs offers on-site supervisor training at no charge, and in some states local community agencies, police departments, chambers of commerce, and/or local EAP consultants are available to conduct classes. However, most companies do not prefer this method of training because of the cost of lost payroll and lost productivity while supervisors stop work to attend the sessions.
- DVD Training. The Council on Alcohol and Drugs maintains a

library of supervisor training DVDs available for checkout to Drug Free Workplace members. For more information, contact Staci Wade at SWade@LiveDrugFree.org, or (404) 223-2486.

- Supervisor Training Newsletters. Many companies find these *Supervisor Training Newsletters* to be the most cost-effective and efficient means of meeting their annual supervisor training requirements. These monthly newsletters provide ongoing and current information about the drug free workplace program and the supervisor's role in carrying it out.

Regardless of the method of training, it is critical that all supervisors be provided with updated information about the drug free workplace program. At a minimum, this training must include the supervisor's specific responsibilities for understanding and carrying out the company's substance abuse policies, and how to enforce the state requirements of the program.

Supervisors must also be trained on how to recognize and deal with employees who have job performance problems that may be related to alcohol or other drugs, including personal and family problems. They should be provided the necessary supervisory materials and forms for documenting unacceptable work performance and be trained on how to recognize when legal reasonable suspicion for conducting a drug test exists.

To help us combat substance abuse, go to www.LiveDrugFree.org and click on "Donate!"