

Substance Misuse

Background Information/Rationale for Focus

Alcohol is the most widely used substance in our society. Of Canada's workers, 80 per cent are current drinkers and 6.5 per cent to 22 per cent of these individuals admit to drinking at the workplace, or shortly before going to work¹. The cost of substance use problems to Ontario workplaces is estimated at \$1.6 billion per year in lost productivity and the overall social cost of substance abuse in Canada in 2002 was estimated to be \$39.8 billion.^{2 3}

For each employee who consumes excessive alcohol, employers pay an extra \$597 per year.⁴

Safety and performance are compromised when employees use alcohol and/or drugs on the job. Workplace alcohol and drug use have been linked with a long list of problems that include:

- Tardiness, absenteeism, increased sick days;
- Needless risk taking, unsafe work practices;
- Productivity/service problems;
- Poor decision making;
- Liability risks;
- Workplace injuries, vehicle or pedestrian crashes;
- Poor morale, frustration, stress, deteriorating work relationships and unhealthy work environment for co-workers;
- Compensation claims, cost of replacing or repairing damaged property or equipment, theft and other crime, cost of replacing/retaining employees and poor public relations for managers;
- Violence in the home or community;
- Chronic diseases such as high blood pressure, cancer and liver disease, and;
- Death.⁵



A typical workplace of 1,000 employees:

- * Has a rate of alcoholism and excessive drinking in the neighbourhood of 10 per cent to 20 per cent.
- * Has a rate of illicit drug use anywhere from 2 per cent to 7 per cent.

Current heavy drinkers and illicit drug users are more than twice as likely to have skipped one or more days of work in the past month.⁷

In Canada, alcohol is listed as a risk factor for chronic disease as it accounts for 9.2% of all burden of disease. Alcohol has been linked with over 60 diseases and conditions. Alcohol is a carcinogen for some types of cancer.⁶

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Workplaces can have a significant impact on the health and safety of their organization by introducing policies that prevent and reduce employee alcohol and drug problems.

Goals For The Workplace To Strive For

1. To promote awareness of the risks associated with alcohol/drug use.
2. To provide a supportive and safe work environment by reducing/preventing potential harms associated with workplace alcohol/drug misuse.
3. To create substance misuse policies to prevent and reduce employee alcohol and drug issues.

Getting Started

Workplace Wellness Team, Environmental Scan and Needs Assessment

- Create a workplace wellness team, which includes employees and management to gauge your workers needs and interests;
- Complete an environmental scan to determine how supportive the workplace is regarding healthy eating and physical activity;
- Conduct a needs assessment to determine what healthy living initiatives are important to employees; and,
- Based on the results of your environmental scan and needs assessment, consult with the workplace wellness team to decide which interventions fit with the requirements of your workplace.

Awareness Raising

- Utilize bulletin boards, displays and pay cheque inserts featuring resources related to substance abuse prevention (ie. Post flyers, fact and tip sheets, to reduce alcohol/drug related risks);
- Include short articles in an internal newsletter or staff-e-mails (check websites e.g. and local newspaper for relevant articles);
- Dedicate an accessible area to display pamphlets and resources regarding low risk drinking guidelines, addictions counseling, etc.; and,
- Include Alcohol Policy in orientation process for new employees.

Skill Building

- Offer presentations/workshops through “lunch and learn” sessions discussing issues of alcohol/drug related risk, low risk drinking guidelines, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), alcohol related liability, mocktails (non alcoholic drinks), party planning, etc.; and,
- Provide continuing education for management and employees on identifying potential workplace substance misuse.

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Creating a Supportive Environment

- Provide ongoing support for a workplace alcohol/drug policy;
- Encourage active and supportive communication between employers and employees and assist staff to access available supports when needed without compromising confidentiality;
- Implement EAP program and openly encourage employees to utilize this confidential service; and,
- Offer incentive programs (i.e. self-help manuals, contests, rewards, etc).

Healthy Workplace Policy Suggestions

- Develop and implement a workplace alcohol/drug policy, involving all levels of staff; and,
- Offer flex time/flexible scheduling policies for personal leave or to attend counseling.



Telephone consultation is available through **Project Health: 519-883-2287**

Region of Waterloo Public Health Resources

Project Health Resources: (call Project Health phone line @ 519-883-2287)

Books:

Let's Take Action on Alcohol Problems in the Workplace: A practical guide to policy development for employers, employees and others concerned about health, safety and liability (Alcohol Policy Network, 2004)

Pamphlets/Fact Sheets:

Women and alcohol
Hangover is the least of your worries

Posters:

Hangover is the least of your worries – More than 1 or 2 drinks per day increases your risk of stroke and cancer (Available in Ojibwe, Tamil, Mandarin, Spanish)

Displays:

Alcohol and Pregnancy – Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Prevention (Best Start)
A Hangover is the Least of Your Worries and Alcohol Models (depict a standard drink)

Other Services:

Phone consultation for substance misuse policy development

Public Health Resource Centre:

To borrow teaching kits/books/video resources please call: 519-883-2256

To order pamphlets: email phrc@region.waterloo.on.ca or call the automated order line at: 519-883-2374 or order online at www.region.waterloo.on.ca/ph --

Resources/Resource Centre/Pamphlets

Pamphlets/Fact Sheets:

Alcohol & drug treatment...for people seeking help

Evaluate your drinking

Low risk drinking guidelines

Women and alcohol

Hangover is the least of your worries

Posters:

Drug and alcohol treatment info line

A Hangover is the Least of Your Worries

Displays:

In the Driver's Seat

A Hangover is the least of your worries

Video:

Drug abuse and the brain

How much is too much? (MADD)

Drunk driving (MADD)

Internet Resources

www.projecthealth.ca

Alcohol Policy Network (see *Workplace* under *Information Packs*)

<http://www.apolnet.org>

Best Start

<http://www.beststart.org>

Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse

<http://www.ccsa.ca>

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

<http://www.camh.net>

D.A.R.T. (Drug and Alcohol Registry of Treatment)

<http://www.dart.on.ca>

Focus Resource Centre

www.frcentre.net/asc.htm

Motherisk

<http://www.motherisk.org>

Region of Waterloo Public Health

www.region.waterloo.on.ca/alcoholanddrugs

National Clearinghouse on Alcohol and Drug Information

<http://ncadi.samhsa.gov>

References

- ¹ Single, E. (1998). *Substance Abuse and the workplace in Canada*. Report prepared for Health Canada. Ottawa: CCSA.
- ² Ontario Prevention Clearinghouse and The Health Communication Unit. (2001). *Health Promotion E-Bulletin #2331*. November 9, 2001.
- ³ Rehm, J. et al. (2006). *The Costs of Substance Abuse in Canada 2002*. Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse.
- ⁴ IAPA. (2008). It's about Making a Difference, *The Business Case for a Healthy Workplace*.
- ⁵ Alcohol Policy Network, Ontario Public Health Association. (2004). *Let's Take Action on Alcohol Problems in the Workplace*.
- ⁶ Centre for Addiction & Mental Health. (2007). *Alcohol and Cancer: Best Advice*.
- ⁷ Bellwood Health Services Inc.(2006). *Economics of Addictions*.



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Supporting Healthy Workplaces