

FACT SHEET 3

Wirral Drugs in the Workplace Initiative

Developing a drugs policy

A policy is a formal statement of an organisation's intent for dealing with any issue, which clearly states the rules and procedures to be followed if action needs to be taken.

Many companies have policies for issues such as health and safety or absence management. A drugs and alcohol policy is no different and even the smallest employer should lay down a code of practice which details the procedures which would be followed if an incident took place.

A policy not only goes some way to protecting you as an employer in the case of a tribunal (demonstrating that your organisation has developed practice guidelines which have been consistently applied) but a well planned policy demonstrates to your employees your organisations commitment to their well-being.

Thread your substance misuse policy into other occupational health and safety policies to ensure an integrated approach.

A substance misuse policy

It makes sense to develop a substance misuse policy to cover the misuse of both drugs and alcohol at work. The effects of alcohol and drug misuse on the workplace and the effective procedures you need to have in place to deal with the issues are similar.

Any promotion of the policy (during induction, in staff handbooks and through your in-house campaigns) should emphasise that it applies to alcohol as much as it does to drug misuse. This will help all your staff to recognise that the policy is relevant to them.

Who to consult?

Consult widely with managers, human resources specialists, trade unions (who can offer guidance), your occupational health department or provider and very importantly, with the people it will impact upon, your workforce. Incorporating their views will help shape the policy to reflect their concerns and will increase its credibility across your workforce.

Ideally a representative working group should drive the development and implementation of the policy, including regular reviews. Key named members of staff should oversee the implementation of the policy.

All staff should be given a written copy of the policy and be involved whenever it is reviewed.

Content

Each policy will be different, reflecting the individual characteristics of your organisation. A good policy would:

- explain your aims and objectives - why you are introducing the policy and what you want it to achieve
- state the meaning of the policy – in the case of a drugs policy you would need to define the term “drug”
- clearly identify employer and employee responsibilities
- incorporate issues relating to your business:
 - is it safety critical?
 - does it need to address certain workers, e.g. drivers or operators of machinery?

Clarify who the policy applies to and explain any variations in implementation among different groups

- define the substances covered by the policy and provide clear guidelines on what would constitute misconduct involving drugs
- explain how people who have drug problems will be treated
- raise awareness of the policy with managers and offer training to managers and supervisors to help them recognise potential drug misuse problems so they can deal with them appropriately
- explain how you will manage incidents, outlining procedures and the help and support available to employees. Set out the company procedures for accessing specialist treatment and support
- provide information for people who are concerned about a loved one with a drug or alcohol problem or who may be experiencing difficulties as a result.

National helplines and websites

FRANK is a national helpline that offers free confidential advice and information about drugs 24 hours a day. Contact FRANK online at www.talktofrank.com or call 0800 77 66 00.

Drinkline provides free and confidential advice on any aspect of drinking. Tel: 0800 917 8282 (Tuesday to Thursday 9.00 am to 11.00 pm, Friday to Monday 24 hours)

Release is a confidential help line offering advice on drug use and legal issues. Tel: 020 7729 9904 Monday to Friday from 10.30 am to 5.30 pm or www.release.org.uk

The Health and Safety Executive website offers advice on policy development and legal issues etc. www.hse.gov.uk/alcoholdrugs/index.htm

DrugScope aims to advise on policy development and reduce drug related risk. Tel: 020 7928 1211 or visit www.drugscope.org.uk

The ACAS advisory booklet Health and Employment **provides information on handling drug related problems in the workplace. Call ACAS Publications on 0870 242 90 90 or view online at www.acas.org.uk**

Making it work

- Put your policy into practice consistently and fairly.
- Remember – if you suspect someone is misusing drugs at work you must investigate the circumstances fully before taking action. In many cases, supporting the employee may be the best plan of action all round.
- Monitor and review your policy regularly (at least annually) to reflect organisational and social change.

Wirral Drugs at Work programme is funded through the Communities Against Drugs initiative – a partnership between Wirral (DAAT) Drug and Alcohol Action Team and Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council's Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership. It aims to:

- reduce drug related crime and disorder
- strengthen community partnership
- disrupt drug markets

