ESSENTIAL 29: Drug and Alcohol-Free Workplace



Key Takeaways:
– Understanding the issues created by drug and alcohol use in the workplace.
– Evaluating signs and symptoms of workplace behavior related to drug and alcohol use.
– Comprehending the best practices on internal reporting of possible drug and alcohol use.
– Recognizing sources for getting help for drug and alcohol misuse.
– Learning the federal requirements for a Drug-Free Workplace program.

Course Description
It is estimated that around 33 million adults are affected by alcohol problems; 14% of the U.S. population. About one out of every seven people at your office are estimated to meet the definition of a ‘problem drinker.’

Reports for drug abuse aren’t any better. About 7 million Americans abuse controlled-substance prescription medications, which leads to more deaths from prescription drug overdoses than auto accidents, according to Drug Enforcement Administration Chief Michele Leonhart. If you also consider illegal drugs like cocaine and heroin, those statistics are increasingly higher.

Of the workplaces that choose to test their employees for drugs on a regular basis, Quest Diagnostics reported that the number of positive drug tests went up nearly 9.3 percent from 2013 to 2014.

Higher reports of positive drug tests could be a result of more testing, but it can also be attributed in part to the rise in prescription drug abuse. More and more employees are misusing stimulants like Adderall and Concerta to help them stay alert, concentrate better and be more productive on the job. This trend is most common among those who work long hours and need a boost to keep them awake and focused.

Regardless that the effects of stimulants may seem positive at first glance, many doctors are concerned about the anxiety, rapid heartbeat and hallucinations that stimulants can incite when taken in high doses. If used on a regular basis, stimulants can also significantly reduce the amount of sleep a body needs for proper functioning.

Common Warning Signs of Drug or Alcohol Problem
– Slow Reactions, Unsteadiness, Confusion
– Recklessness
– Frequent Accidents
– Absenteeism and Tardiness
– Unreliability
– Declining Performance
– Drug-Free Workplace Program

Drug and Alcohol-Free Workplace programs offer a way for employees to get help for themselves. As well, it's a way co-workers get help for other co-workers. Preventing drug and alcohol abuse from entering the workplace is about safety, but it's also about getting employees the help they may need to stay healthy and employed. In addition, there are standards for employees working directly for or contracted by the federal government.

As well, Drug and Alcohol-Free Workplace programs increasingly address the risk of tobacco. Progressive safety and health professionals want to implement 'tobacco-free zones' and work to improve the total health of the people served by the organizations they support. Currently, hospitals and healthcare providers are popular examples of institutions moving forward with tobacco-free workplace policies. These efforts are being made because 1 out of every 5 deaths in the United States is the result of tobacco use and exposure. Deadly risks include cancer, heart and lung disease, second-hand smoke, and burn injuries incurred during fires directly resulting from cigarette use.

The one way employers can begin to mitigate the impact of drug and alcohol abuse in the workplace is through Drug and Alcohol-Free Workplace programs. Drug and Alcohol-Free Workplace programs are meant to not interfere in anyone's personal life, but to improve safety in the workplace. In high-risk work environments, risk and liability both rise when drugs and alcohol enter the workplace.

Drug-Free Workplace Program Federal Requirements – An employee printed statement – A drug-free awareness program – Copies of the policy statement to distribute – Teaching how the policy affects conditions of employment – Informing contracting officers about employee convictions – Performing appropriate action Printed Statement Federally contracted employers are required to publish a statement notifying every employee about company policy and that the unlawful manufacture, distribution, dispensing, possession, or use of a controlled substance is prohibited in the workplace. This statement needs to specify what actions will be taken by the employer against any employee who violates this policy. Drug-Free Awareness Program The employer must practice a drug-free awareness program to inform employees about: – Dangers caused by drug abuse in the workplace. – Company policy and the activities used to maintain a drug-free workplace. – Every type of services available, such as drug counseling, rehabilitation, and employee assistance programs. – Any penalties that will be imposed on employees who violate the drug-free workplace policy. Policy Statement Everyone who is employed because of a government agreement is required to have a copy of the company Drug-Free Workplace statement. The company document must explain all employee requirements around the program and how the company supports the federal program to provide a drug-free workplace. Employment Conditions Federal guidelines make federally contracted employers give each employee a written statement to explain that employees must abide by the terms of the company program. In government contracted companies, an employee must notify their

employer in writing about any criminal drug statute conviction for any violation that occurs in the workplace, which must be done within 5 calendar days following the conviction. Notify Contracting Officer Employers must notify the government contracting officer within 10 calendar days after learning about an employee’s conviction. Employer notification may be a direct communication with the employee or from other legal sources. The contracting officer’s notification will include the position title of the employee working on the government agreement. Action Taken The Drug-Free Workplace Act states that specific action is needed when there are convictions for drug abuse in the workplace. However, these requirements are for companies receiving government agreements. In the case that there is a drug abuse conviction, the employer has 30 days to take action against the employee. It is required that convictions of drug abuse violations that occur in the workplace and that every action taken follows company policy. Possible actions can vary from requiring the employee to participate in a drug abuse assistance or rehabilitation program to termination of employment.