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Top 10 Strategies to Raise Drug and Alcohol Awareness in the Workplace

Top 10 strategies to deal with drug and alcohol issues in the UK workplace, increasing corporate image, productivity and staff job satisfaction and reducing absenteeism, sickness and accidents.....

1. Incorporate drug and alcohol awareness training into the induction process for all new employees, setting out what the company will or will not allow in respect to drug and alcohol use and the procedures for dealing with issues should they arise, this is a good opportunity to inform all new employees of the company's commitment to supporting employees health and wellbeing, and improving their corporate image.
2. Develop and update a comprehensive drug and alcohol policy and involve employees and union representatives in the process, research suggests that involving employees in this process gives them ownership of the policy and they are therefore more likely to adhere to it and know how to bring to the attention of management if a colleague is showing signs of the effects of misuse.
3. Deliver training to Managers to identify behavioral signs of drug and alcohol use amongst employees, such as mood changes, deterioration in relationships with colleague, impaired job performance, time off and lateness, the cost to the economy is £20 billion per year. Open and honest discussions around drug and alcohol use in a supportive environment is proven to be as effective in treatment as medical intervention. There are many suppliers of drug awareness courses or alcohol awareness courses, so it should be straightforward to find drug awareness training or alcohol awareness training.
4. Ensure drug and alcohol awareness training is delivered to Managers in order for them to be confident and competent in identifying environmental signs of drug and alcohol use, including paraphernalia often spotted at the scene of drug or alcohol use such as discarded bottles, foil, broken cigarettes and cigarette papers, this can often confirm if illegal activities are taking place. Taking steps to encourage your managers knowledge of drug awareness and alcohol awareness will pay dividends in the long term.

5. Carry out general awareness training to all employees around units and strengths of alcohol and how long it takes the body to eliminate it, (a quarter of the population drink above the weekly guidelines) critically important prior to Christmas and new year celebrations, more and more often the police are stopping and breathalysing drivers on their way to work having been to a celebration the evening before. Employees are often confused as to how many units they have consumed and are not aware of how much alcohol is in their system the morning after.

6. Use the company sickness policy to effectively manage drug and alcohol misuse prior to formal disciplinary proceedings, it is often far more cost effective to support an employee through a period of drug and/or alcohol use than to re-recruit and re-train a new member of staff. Employees may have periods of stress, bereavement, or

relationship breakdown that causes them to use drugs or alcohol to cope, they are appreciative of employers who

help support them through these times and regain their place in the organisation, often becoming more respectful.

7. Have clear whistle blowing procedures to allow employees to bring to the managers attention drug and alcohol

issues by colleagues, research suggests that employees do not feel able to bring to their managers attention unsafe

working practices by colleagues and would rather carry out their tasks and responsibilities than be seen as a grass.

Far from resolving situations this is seen to create conflict and ill feeling amongst many teams of employees.

8. Ensure all employees are aware of confidentiality and feel able to discuss drug and alcohol issues with HR, a clear

written statement by the organisation in the employees handbook sets the tone for dealing with such issues, giving

clarity to the circumstances that the sickness procedure will be used and when disciplinary proceedings need to be

taken.

9. Offer a drug and alcohol assistance programme this can include a variety of measures an employee can access,

organisations can make the information accessible via the employee handbook or staff room posters measures can

include telephone help line numbers, sign-posting to community services, assessment and counselling. Statistical

outcomes can be relayed back to management and HR giving fitness to work reports and advice.

10. Drug and alcohol testing is a sensitive issue because of the many employment implications involved. Securing the

agreement of the workforce to the principle of screening is essential due to the practical and legal issues involved.

Areas to consider include cost, type of test, how samples will be collected and what action should be taken if a

positive test is given. There is a strong case for screening in safety critical jobs, in others it may never be the

complete answer but another area to consider.