

# Drinking in the Workplace

Drinking in the workplace is a problem that affects all of us. Accidents in the workplace and lost days of work related to substance abuse including alcohol cost American businesses money, costs which are past onto the consumer. In addition, if you are a co-worker of a substance user you could be injured in an accident caused by the user.

So how many people work and drink? According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) 6.6% of full time workers in the United States drink heavily. Heavy drinking is defined as having five or more drinks on five or more days in the last month. (1)

As many as 40% of industrial fatalities and 47% of industrial injuries can be attributed to alcohol consumption or alcoholism. (2) Not all the problems are caused by alcoholics, in fact many accidents are caused by the casual drinker. Sixty percent of alcohol related work performance problems are caused by employees who occasionally drink too much on a work night or at lunch time. (3) Twenty-one percent of co-workers of those who use alcohol complain of being put in danger of being injured, having to re-do work or cover for a co-worker, or needing to work harder to make up the work that is not being done by the person using alcohol. (4)

There are many factors that contribute to employee drinking. Having a boring, stressful or isolated work situation is one. Lack of job complexity is another. When employees feel that they lack control over work conditions and products, they may increase the use of alcohol. Verbal and physical aggression including sexual harassment and disrespectful behavior of co-workers are also seen as factors. When alcohol is considered part of the culture of the workplace and life style of employees and it is readily available there is an increase rate of drinking. Also, limited work supervision contributes to use. Some occupations have a high prevalence of past month heavy alcohol use. These include "construction and extraction occupations (17.8 percent) and installation, maintenance, and repair occupations (14.7 percent)." (5)

Workers who drink on the job or outside the workplace take more sick days, are more likely to sleep on the job, be unable to perform their job correctly and cause more problems with co-workers. This all adds up to increase costs for the consumer.

There is no single program that companies can institute to combat this substance abuse problem. Each company must look at their own environment and the factors that contribute to alcohol use. A good program will include a written policy statement, supervisor training in understanding and enforcing company policy, employee education and awareness of the effects of alcohol and other drugs and alcohol and drug testing. Companies are increasingly using EAPs or Employee Assistance Programs to provide counseling and other assistance to employees to help them overcome their alcohol and drug problems.

The problems not only occur because an employee drinks or abuses drugs but also if an employee's family member abuses alcohol and drugs. These workers are often distracted at work by the concerns about the family member at home.

This is a problem that we all need to work together to reduce. It hurts everyone.

If you have questions or need more information, call the Eddy County DWI office at 234-9963 or email Ms. Sharif at [csharif@co.eddy.nm.us](mailto:csharif@co.eddy.nm.us).

#### References:

1. National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), National Household Survey on Drug Abuse: Main Findings 1997, 4/99, p. 111)
2. M. Bernstein & JJ Mahoney, "Management Perspectives on Alcoholism: The Employer's Stale in Alcoholism Treatment," Occupational Medicine, Vol 4, No. 2, 1989, pp. 223-232).
3. (TW Mangione, et. Al, "new Perspectives for Worksite Alcohol Strategies: Results from a Corporate Drinking Study," JSI Research and Training Institute, Inc. Boston MA, 12/98, p. 1).
4. (TW Mangione, et. Al, "new Perspectives for Worksite Alcohol Strategies: Results from a Corporate Drinking Study," JSI Research and Training Institute, Inc. Boston MA, 12/98, p. 2).
5. "Worker Substance Use and Workplace Policies and Programs" DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Office of Applied Studies, June 2007(Figure 3.2 and Table 3.3.