

Facilities Management from A to Z

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Alcohol

Inappropriate alcohol consumption can lead to serious workplace safety hazards. Even small amounts can impair an individual's judgement and reactions, increasing the risk of an accident occurring. Alcohol abuse can lead to problems with absenteeism and sickness, reduced productivity and unprofessional behaviour, which can lead to lost business, service failure and damaged reputation.

Having clear policies on alcohol can help employers, managers and employees to deal with any issues that may arise. The development and implementation of such policies helps in meeting the employer's legal responsibility to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of their employees.

Policies usually have a disciplinary element, for instance setting out what action might be taken if alcohol abuse interferes with an employee's work. But as prevention is better than cure, an effective policy will stress that support will be offered to any employee with problems in this area.

In businesses where people operate machinery or drive vehicles, a strict no-alcohol rule may be necessary for health and safety reasons. Other businesses might not need to be this strict and moderate lunchtime drinking may be permitted. However in facilities roles where tools and equipment are often involved and customer facing activities are common place, a complete ban on alcohol is not unusual.

Clear guidelines should be laid out detailing the disciplinary consequences of alcohol-related problems at work. For example, an employee drinking and driving while on company business might be dismissed.

A good facilities manager will learn to watch for signs that might indicate an employee is having problems. These could include frequent hangovers, above average sick absence, reduced productivity, workplace accidents, disciplinary problems or customer complaints. Confidential records should be maintained of signs such as these to allow a picture to be created of any problems there may be.

Many employers use similar methods to deal with drugs and alcohol abuse. For example, some organisations now treat drug and alcohol dependence as an illness and frame policies aimed at rehabilitation. This approach can encourage employees to seek treatment. However, drugs differ from alcohol as use is generally not socially acceptable and is often illegal. Some drugs can more rapidly affect physical and mental health than alcohol, so the earlier the problem can be dealt with, the greater chance there is of rehabilitation.

An employer has clear responsibilities for the health, safety and welfare of their employees. A company might be liable to charges if they allow employees under the influence of alcohol to continue working where this places them or others at risk.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has a free leaflet INDG 240 'Don't Mix It. A guide for employers on alcohol at work' available for download at www.hse.gov.uk