

THE MCINTYRE GROUP
INSURANCE BROKERS & CONSULTANTS

For Your Safety



Why Every Workplace Should Use Drug Tests and Have Strict Policies

Millions of people use illegal drugs every year, and experts estimate that about 60 percent of the world's illegal drugs are consumed by Americans. A survey showed that almost 23 million Americans reported using marijuana more than three times per week. In addition to this, more than 15 million Americans abuse alcohol. Almost 75 percent of illegal drug users and alcohol abusers are actively employed today. Studies have shown that drug use causes both physical and mental impairments, which can be disastrous in the workplace. In dangerous industries such as construction and mining, studies conducted by experts found that drug use was even more common.

In addition to putting their businesses at risk for fatal or serious accidents, employers who hire drug users may wind up paying for their mistakes. The following are some disadvantages about hiring drug users:

- They perform their work poorly.
- They usually change jobs frequently.
- They often file workers' compensation claims and collect benefits for longer periods.

- They are not very productive.
- They usually arrive late or call in sick.
- Their negligence often results in lawsuits.

By forming a solid plan against drugs and alcohol abuse, employers can help reduce their own risks. Every employer should require drug testing for new hires as a condition of employment. Random drug testing during employment is another way to discourage drug users from applying in the first place. This is especially important for larger businesses, and about 70 percent of big businesses already have these plans in place. Some small businesses may not be able to afford extensive testing and screening plans. However, some businesses may be able to find solutions by searching and using outside resources. Since drug users are starting to target small businesses they know do not have such plans in place, it is in these business owners' best interest to form screening programs. The benefits of having such a plan include the following:

- Employees have better attitudes about work.

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- There is not as much theft in the workplace.
- There are less accidents in the workplace.
- Employers have lower staff turnover rates.
- Drug-free workplaces are more productive.
- Employers have less insurance costs.
- Employees enjoy a safer workplace.

Overall, drug programs can save money, so they are worth the time and money to implement. To create an effective program, employers should outline their expectations for employees. A plan should also outline how offenses and infractions will be handled. Some states have specific laws regarding employees and drug addiction, so it is important to keep applicable laws in mind. Whenever possible, an ideal program should include a no-tolerance policy. Employers should also outline what they consider to be illegal and intolerable drugs. Some policies may include designated smoking areas for cigarette users, and employers should always make it clear that alcohol use shortly before or during work is strictly prohibited.

With so many people struggling to fight their own personal battles today, it is important for employers to also show that they care about employees. While it is still

good to have a zero-tolerance policy for drugs or alcohol, employers should make provisions in their programs for assistance to struggling workers. For example, a worker who comes to his boss to admit a drinking problem at home may not be violating any rules but may be in danger of violating them. If an employee honestly expresses concern, it is important for employers to provide information about alcohol treatment programs. Some workplaces may also do the same for people who have struggled with addiction in the past. Many workers do not know there are assistance programs available, so this information should be repeated frequently in the workplace.

Employers should also know how to identify possible signs of drug and alcohol abuse. Workers who seem depressed, angry or withdrawn should be monitored. If a worker is late frequently or calls in sick, these may also be signs to consider. Employees who seem anxious, distracted or paranoid may be using drugs. The key idea employers should remember is to look for noticeable changes in all workers. Employers can also offer incentives for employees maintaining a drug-free workplace.



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