

Alcohol and drugs found to contribute to workplace injuries

Details of incidents

Workplace Standards Tasmania inspectors have recently investigated a number of complaints about people affected by alcohol and drugs in the workplace, as well as a number of serious accidents where the injured workers registered positive readings to alcohol and/or a variety of illicit drugs.

Employers of someone affected by alcohol or drugs may face unwanted operating costs from damage to plant, absenteeism, injuries to workers, and breaches of the *Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995*.

Contributing factors

Even if someone drinks or uses drugs outside work, if their judgement, co-ordination or concentration is impaired, they could cause a workplace accident or injury. They not only place themselves at risk of injury; they can also affect the safety of their co-workers.

Recommendations

Under the *Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995* and *Workplace Health and Safety Regulations 1998*, workers:

- must not consume alcohol or drugs in the workplace. The exception is medication required for legitimate medical reasons; they must tell their employer if taking (or failing to take) the medication could affect workplace health and safety
- must make sure that they are not, by taking alcohol or drugs, in such a state that they endanger their own safety in the workplace or the safety of anyone else
- must tell their employer if they believe a co-worker is affected by alcohol or drugs.

Under the *Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995* and *Workplace Health and Safety Regulations 1998*, employers:

- must arrange for a worker to be safely removed from the workplace if they believe the worker cannot safely perform their work (or may endanger the safety of others in the workplace) because they are affected by alcohol or drugs
- should conduct a risk assessment to manage alcohol and drugs as workplace hazards
- should develop an alcohol and drug policy that is appropriate for their workplace and the level of risk.

For more information and practical guidance, read *Stress, Bullying, Alcohol and other Drug Misuse: Hidden Hazards*. There is a guide for employers (GBI 36A) and a guide for workers (GBI 36B). Call the Helpline on 1300 366 322 or go to www.workcover.tas.gov.au for your free copy.

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Enforcement options

Workplace Standards inspectors have the power to issue section 38 notices to require employers to implement controls that are appropriate to the level of risk. Such notices have already been issued in a number of cases.

Employers and workers may also face prosecution where it is found that the *Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995* and *Workplace Health and Safety Regulations 1998* have been breached.

Where impairment due to alcohol and drug use is considered a factor in a workplace accident, the courts will take into account whether or not an alcohol and drugs policy exists, and how consistently it has been implemented.

If you would like further information contact Workplace Standards Tasmania on:
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1 August 2009