

Alcohol and Drugs in the Workplace

The effect of alcohol and drugs in the workplace is a growing problem. Employees under the influence of alcohol or drugs affect productivity, absenteeism rates and present health and safety risks. In the UK, drug and alcohol abuse is responsible for:

- £7.3 billion lost productivity due to alcohol (Institute of Alcohol Studies)
- Alcohol is estimated to be responsible for 3-5% of all absences from work, approximately 8-14 million working days each year (HSE)
- Estimated social and economic costs in England and Wales of drug related crime is £16 billion per year (www.bma.org.uk).

What is it?

Substance misuse covers alcohol, drugs and solvents. Different drugs will have different effects on people, but here we have presented a brief outline on the 3 most common substances likely to cause issues in the workplace.

Alcohol

What it does

Depresses the central nervous system. Physical dependence can develop – leading to fits/seizures, blackouts and possibly death.

How it can affect people

- Impairs judgement and reduces reaction times, which can lead to accidents or mistakes at work.
- Hangovers and their symptoms include tiredness, dehydration, headache, nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea.
- Memory loss.
- Disturbed sleep.
- Physical health deteriorates.
- Anxiety and depression.
- Regular absences can occur – both short term (after weekend binges) and long term (when physical dependence or hospital admissions).
- Lack of personal hygiene, breath odour - often disguised by mints, chewing gum, strong aftershave/perfume.

How it can affect people (continued)

- Unkempt personal appearance.

80mg is the current legal drink drive limit. Between 20–50mg the risk of a fatal vehicle accident triples. Between 50–80mg there is 6 times the risk of a fatal accident (Institute of Alcohol Studies).

Other items of note

On average it takes a healthy liver one-hour per unit after the first half an hour to remove alcohol from the body. So if you drink 5 pints of 5% lager or 5 large glasses of wine this equates to 15 units and would take a minimum of 15.5 hours to leave your system from the time you **started drinking**.

Cannabis

What it does

Depresses the central nervous system.
Is hallucinogenic and can cause a psychological dependence.
Current status is a Class B drug and illegal.

How it can affect people

- Impaired co-ordination – difficulties operating machinery, driving etc.
- Lack of concentration, can be confused or suffer with memory loss.
- Difficulties learning.
- Loss of motivation.
- Tiredness, disturbed sleep patterns.
- Anxiety and depression.
- Blood shot eyes.
- Paranoia, hallucinations.

Other items of note

When cannabis is combined with alcohol there can be 16 times greater risk of an accident (www.talktofrank.com).

Cannabis can stay in someone's system for several weeks and is detectable in saliva between 2 - 24 hours after use.

Cocaine

What it does

Is a central nervous system stimulant.
Causes a psychological dependence.
Current status is a Class A drug and illegal.

How it can affect people

- Behaviour can become arrogant, loud, aggressive, over confident or excitable.
- Lack of appetite.
- Dilated pupils.
- Regular sniffing, runny nose – can result in nose bleeds, perforated septum.

How it can affect people (continued)

- Disturbed sleep.
- Anxiety and depression.
- The after affects can last for days – paranoia, mood swings, agitation, lack of concentration and flu-like symptoms.

Other items of note

Cocaine mixed with alcohol creates cocaethylene – which increases the chance of heart attack by 24 times (www.talktofrank.com).

Cocaine is detectable in saliva for approx 2 – 5 days after use.

Why is it important to me?

Anyone can develop a substance misuse problem. Alcohol and/or drugs are often used either as a coping mechanism for life's problems or to mask difficulties that someone may be facing at home or work. Anyone with a substance misuse problem could be negatively impacting on team performance at work as well as be a health and safety risk to themselves and others.

If you are an employee, manager or supervisor and can see signs of potential substance abuse amongst colleagues, you should be alert to the sources of help and advice they may need. People affected may require long-term specialist support to resolve their dependencies.

IQ believes that being a professional working in the quarrying and minerals products industry means working well with others in a team based environment. This means being able to understand factors that can impact on team performance, including when someone may be affected by substance misuse. This is why it features on our **Skills Wheel** which captures all the key skill and knowledge areas we believe are vital to successful career development in the industry.

Where Next?

There are a number of websites where you can get further information and advice:

NHS: www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Alcohol/Pages/Alcoholhome.aspx & www.nhs.uk/Livewell/drugs/Pages/Drugshome.aspx

Health and Safety Executive (HSE): www.hse.gov.uk/alcoholdrugs

Engagement, Influence & Impact Factsheets

www.quarrying.org



Trade Union Congress (TUC):

<https://www.tuc.org.uk/resource/drugs-and-alcohol-workplace>

Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitrary Service (ACAS):

www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1986

Talk to Frank:

<https://www.talktofrank.com/get-help/find-support-near-you>

Institute of Quarrying

IQ supports professionals working within the quarrying and minerals products industry through membership and training. These factsheets are produced across a range of topics to share ideas and best practice. Further information can be found via the resources section on the IQ website www.quarrying.org.