

# Drugs and Alcohol

The GPMU is concerned that there are a number of members who are risking their health and their jobs through substance abuse. In line with common terminology, this abuse will be described throughout this policy in terms of drugs and alcohol.

It should be noted that, 'drug abuse' follows the HSE definition, and refers to the *use* of illegal drugs, and the *misuse*, whether deliberate or unintentional, of prescribed drugs and substances such as solvents.

Although alcohol is a drug, it is referred to separately in this policy because society tends to regard it differently from other drugs. In practice however, the measures needed to deal with alcohol problems in the workplace are very similar to those appropriate to other drugs and substances.

It is important that employers have in place drug and alcohol policies that have been developed with GPMU involvement, to ensure that they are in the best interests of GPMU members. Such policies will be essential where any drug and alcohol problems are found to exist, but, preferably, they should be agreed in advance of any such problems coming to light.

A drug and alcohol policy is a formal statement which sets out a company's policy and procedure including education and training for helping employees with drug or alcohol related problems.

Within the policy, an employee with a drug or drink problem should be seen in the same way as one with a more generally accepted health problem. Such a policy should assume that employees, at whatever level, who are identified as having a drug or drink problem affecting their work performance, conduct at work, or working relationships, will be offered help rather than dismissal.

## Signs of Drug or Alcohol Abuse

Some of the signs associated with drug or alcohol abuse may be caused, or aggravated, by other factors such as stress, and should be regarded only as indications that an employee may have a drug or alcohol problem.

Signs of possible drug or alcohol abuse include:

- sudden change in behaviour pattern
- memory lapses and tendency to become confused
- irritability and possibly violence
- abnormal fluctuations in mood and energy
- impaired job performance
- poor time-keeping
- increase in short term sickness absence
- deterioration in relationships with other people
- physical deterioration

## Benefits for Employers

In addition to the benefit to individuals in tackling their drug or drink problems, employers can benefit from the introduction of a successful policy in a number of ways, for example by:

- saving on the cost of recruiting and training new employees to replace those whose employment might have been terminated
- saving on absenteeism or reduced productivity
- improving the morale of other employees where intervention and treatment are seen to be successful
- reducing the risk of accidents
- enhancing the public perception of the organisation as a responsible employer

## Legal duties

Employers also have legal responsibilities relating to their staff.

The Health and Safety at Work Act places duties on both employers and employees. Under Section 2 employers are required to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of all their employees.

Section 7 of the Act requires employees to take reasonable care of the health and safety of themselves and others who may be affected by their acts or omissions at work.

The principal legislation in the UK for controlling drug use and preventing abuse is the Misuse of Drugs Act. It deals with nearly all drugs with abuse and/or dependence liability. Of particular relevance to employers is the offence committed by the occupier of premises if she/he knowingly permits the production or supply of any controlled drugs, the smoking of cannabis or certain other activities to take place on those premises.

Although it would be up to the courts to decide the merits of each case, an employer who knowingly allows a drug abuser to continue working without doing anything either to help the abuser, or to protect the rest of the workforce, may be liable to charges.

## Model Joint Company/GPMU Drug and Alcohol Policy

### 1. Introduction

.....(Company name) and GPMU have agreed the need for drug and alcohol policy which applies to all employees irrespective of status. Its objective is to ensure employees receive training and information on sensible drinking and drug awareness. The aim is to encourage those with drug or alcohol-related problems to seek the support of medical advice and counselling by an outside agency.

### 2. General Principle

.....(Company name) and GPMU recognise that drug or alcohol abuse at its various levels is a health problem requiring sympathetic help and special treatment. It is the aim of this policy to provide this.

### 3. Organisation

.....is the Director with responsibility for implementation of this policy.

.....will be responsible for advice on suitable outside agencies and counsellors.

.....will be responsible for implementing a training programme.

The names of external drug and alcohol counsellors and how they can be contacted will be posted on notice boards. All such counsellors will be made aware of this policy on drugs and alcohol.

## **4. Arrangements**

### **4.1 Information**

Every employee will be given a summary of the main points of this policy, and anyone with a drug or alcohol related problem will be encouraged to seek counselling. A training session and leaflets on sensible drinking and drug awareness will be provided and repeated periodically.

### **4.2 Removal of Stress**

It is accepted that stress at work can contribute to drug or alcohol abuse. We are therefore committed to identifying and reducing workplace stress factors.

### **4.3 Reducing Opportunity to Drink at Work**

Research shows quite clearly that some jobs involve a much higher risk of alcohol abuse than others. The social pressure to drink can be stronger in some working communities. Irregular hours, travel and separation from the family, and the strain of a heavy workload are just some of the common job-related causes of alcohol abuse.

The Company and GPMU recognise that such problems, coupled with the opportunity to drink at work, creates a hazard. Therefore,

- a) Alcohol will not be available on company premises during working hours. This will apply throughout the company, at all levels, without exception.
- b) At any social functions organised by the company or GPMU, among the beverages provided, there will always be non-alcoholic drinks available.

### **4.4 Solvent abuse at work**

Where problems involve the deliberate or unintentional abuse of solvents, whether or not used in the workplace, the person concerned will be covered by this policy. Where abused solvents are specifically work related, the employer will ensure that the use of solvents has been subject to the provisions of the Control Of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations (COSHH Regs), that the risks involved have been assessed and that measures have been taken to reduce all exposures to solvents to the lowest that is reasonably practicable.

### **4.5 Prescribed drugs**

Where problems involve the deliberate or unintentional abuse of prescribed drugs, the person concerned will be covered by this policy.

## **5. Confidentiality**

The company undertakes to ensure that any counselling is strictly confidential, and that any records compiled by a counsellor will be treated as the individual property of that counsellor. No discussions about an employee will take place between the company and the counsellor without the written permission of the person concerned.

All employees will have the right to be represented by their GPMU representative in any meeting with the company if they so wish. If an employee gives their written consent, then their GPMU official will be kept informed at all stages of the treatment.

## **6. Job Security**

The company accepts that job security will be maintained for any employee participating in treatment and/or counselling in an attempt to deal with drug or alcohol abuse.

Where an employee has to be away from work to undergo treatment, their job will be held open in accordance with normal sickness procedures. However, it has to be accepted that, in the long-term, job security must depend on work returning to an acceptable level. Advice will be sought and consideration given as to whether the person's original job would be consistent with maintaining recovery. The employee's pension rights will be protected during treatment and counselling.

## **7. Disciplinary Procedures**

Drug or alcohol abuse will not in itself constitute grounds for dismissal, unless the person's action or performance reaches an unacceptable level. Such cases will be dealt with under normal disciplinary procedures with the employee's appropriate GPMU representative being involved at all stages.

Where an employee is referred for treatment under this policy, any disciplinary procedures associated with drug or alcohol abuse will be suspended and remain so for the duration of the treatment.

Where an employee with an drug or alcohol-related problem is able to continue to perform his/her duties whilst undergoing treatment, adequate time off for treatment will be allowed.

Relapses will be referred to the independent counsellor for assessment, and consideration given to further job protection.

## **8. Treatment and Advice**

Any employee with a drug or alcohol-related problem is encouraged to seek guidance and assistance from the recommended local counselling agency.

Where indicators, such as poor work performance, absenteeism, poor health or deteriorating behaviour, indicate a possible problem, employees will be advised to refer themselves for confidential counselling and advice. Paid time off for counselling and treatment will be allowed in accordance with the normal sick pay scheme. Refusal of treatment will not in itself be grounds for discipline, unless an employee's action or performance reaches an unacceptable level. Such a case would then be dealt with under normal procedures, with the involvement of the appropriate GPMU representative at all stages.

## **9. Testing**

The company agrees that there will be no random or company wide drug or alcohol testing.

Any proposals to introduce testing will be discussed in detail between the employer and the GPMU, in light of the practical, legal, industrial relations and ethical implications. Proposals for testing will be subject to the GPMU policy on Medical Examinations and Health Surveillance. This requires:

- written justification for the tests
- description of test procedures and their verification/effectiveness
- stating of standards to be reached
- the consequences of failing the test
- safeguards on continuity of employment
- verification of the qualifications of the testers
- medical confidentiality of results

If testing procedures are agreed, they must only be enacted on suspicion based on specific personal observations that the person concerned is under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Tests will be at the expense of the company.

Any person testing positive shall have the right to challenge the results and obtain an independent analysis of the sample.

Any person testing positive, who accepts the results, will be referred for treatment and advice in accordance with the rest of this policy.

### **Further information**

“Don't mix it! A guide for employers on alcohol at work.”  
Department of Health/Health Education Authority/HSE,  
1996. (IND(G)240L)  
Single copy free from HSE Books.

Workplace Alcohol Services Training Pack from Alcohol Concern, Workplace Advisory Service, 32-36 Loman Street, London SE1 0EE. Tel: 0171-928 7377.

Industrial Pack: Guidelines on Alcohol Problems at Work from Institute of Alcohol Studies, Alliance House, 12 Caxton Street, London SW1H 0QS. Tel: 0171 222 4001

“Drug abuse at work - a guide for employers”  
Health and Safety Executive IND(G) 91L (1994)  
Single copy free from HSE Books

### **National contacts**

#### **National Drugs Helpline**

**Tel: 0800 776600**

Provides advice, information, counselling and referral to appropriate services for anyone concerned about their own, or someone else's, drug use.

#### **Standing Conference on Drug Abuse (SCODA)**

**Tel: 0171-928-9500**

National co-ordinating organisation for services working with people who have drug problems. Provides specialist advice on local drug services and best practice information on drug treatment and care, prevention and education.

#### **Scottish Drugs Forum**

**Tel: 0141 221 1175**

Scottish equivalent of SCODA.

#### **Alcohol Concern**

**Tel: 0171 928 7377**

National agency for alcohol misuse in England and Wales. Provides advice and information on local services.

#### **Scottish Council on Alcohol**

**Tel: 0141-333-9677**

The national body in Scotland dealing with all aspects of alcohol related problems with a network of 27 affiliated Councils.

#### **Northern Ireland Council on Alcohol**

**Tel: 01232-664434**

Offers a treatment and advice service, including relapse and follow-up counselling, information and education services. They have a workplace service to industry to promote and develop alcohol policies and train appropriate personnel.