



Drug-Free Workplaces Add Value to PEOs, Clients, and Communities

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Professional human resource services continue to be among the key benefits PEOs provide to clients and co-employees. In fact, as PEOs know, the changing nature and ever-increasing complexity of the human resource function are largely responsible for the growth of the PEO industry in recent years.

A sometimes-overlooked value-added human resource service PEOs can offer is drug-free workplace programs. Such programs help businesses increase productivity, boost bottom lines, and manage risk. They also send a clear message that PEOs and clients care about the health and safety of their employees.

Providing drug-free workplace services is especially important because PEO clients are primarily small businesses. Despite being most vulnerable to the negative impact of alcohol and drug abuse, small businesses are less likely than their larger counterparts to have programs in place to address it.

A comprehensive drug-free workplace program generally includes five components: a written policy, supervisor training, employee education, employee assistance, and drug testing. Although employers may choose not to include all five, it is recommended all be explored when developing a program. Employers should examine the needs of their work-

force and take steps to ensure the programs they design will work well in their companies. Because each business is unique, there is no one right way to establish a drug-free workplace program. A careful assessment will determine which elements are most feasible and beneficial, as well as which may be unnecessary or unsuitable.

Written Policy

A written policy is the foundation of a drug-free workplace program. Every organization's policy should be tailored to meet its specific needs; however, all effective policies have some aspects in common, including:

- Why the policy is being implemented. Rationale can be as simple as a company being committed to protecting the safety, health, and well-being of its employees and patrons and recognizing that alcohol and drug abuse compromises this dedication.
- A clear description of prohibited behaviors. At a minimum, this should include the following statement: "The use, possession, transfer, or sale of illegal drugs by employees is prohibited."
- An explanation of the consequences for violating the policy. These may include discipline up to and including termination and/or referral for assistance. Consequences should be consistent with existing personnel policies and any applicable state laws.

Sharing all policies with all employees is essential for success; therefore, employers should be certain all employees are aware of the policy and drug-free workplace program.

Supervisor Training

After developing a drug-free workplace policy, an organization should train those individuals closest to its workforce — supervisors. Training should ensure that supervisors understand:

- The drug-free workplace policy;
- Ways to recognize and deal with employees who have performance problems that may be related to alcohol and other drugs; and
- How to refer employees to available assistance.

Relative to a drug-free workplace program, supervisors' responsibilities should include monitoring employees' performance, staying alert to and documenting performance problems, and enforcing the policy. Supervisors should not, however, be expected to diagnose alcohol and drug problems or provide counseling to employees who may have them.

It is important to note that if supervisors are responsible for making referrals for drug testing based on reasonable suspicion, they must be trained on how to make that determination.

Employee Education

A drug and alcohol education program provides employees with the information they need to cooperate with and benefit from their company's drug-free workplace program. Effective programs provide company-specific information, such as the details of the drug-free workplace policy, as well as general information about the nature of alcohol and drug addiction; its

impact on work performance, health and personal life; and types of help available for related problems.

All employees should participate, and the message should be delivered on an ongoing basis through a variety of means such as home mailings, workplace displays, brown-bag lunches, guest speakers, seminars, and sessions at new employee orientation.

Employee Assistance

A critical component of a drug-free workplace is providing assistance or support to employees who have problems with alcohol and other drugs. Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) are worksite programs that provide problem identification, assessment, and referral services for employees. EAPs are an extremely effective vehicle for addressing poor workplace performance that may stem from an employee's personal problems, including alcohol and drug abuse.

EAPs are an excellent benefit to employees and their families and clearly demonstrate employers' respect for their staff. They also offer an alternative to dismissal and minimize employers' legal vulnerability by demonstrating efforts to support employees. In addition to counseling and referrals, many EAPs offer related services such as supervisor training and employee education.

At a minimum, businesses should maintain a resource file from which employees can access information about community-based resources, treatment programs, and help lines.

Drug Testing

Some employers decide to drug test employees for a variety of reasons, such as deterring and detecting drug use, as well as providing concrete evidence for intervention, referral to treatment, and/or disciplinary action. Before deciding to conduct testing, employers should consider a few factors, including:

- Who will be tested? Options may include all staff, job applicants, and/or

employees in safety-sensitive positions.

- When will tests be conducted? Possibilities include pre-employment, upon reasonable suspicion or for cause, post-accident, randomly, periodically, and post-rehabilitation.
- Which drugs will be tested for? Options include testing applicants and employees for illegal drugs and testing employees for a broader range of substances, including alcohol and certain prescription drugs.
- How will tests be conducted? Different testing modes are available, and many states have laws that dictate which may and may not be used.

Incorporating drug-free workplace services into the PEO service menu adds value well beyond the PEO-client relationship. Not only do drug-free workplaces protect worker safety and health, they also help businesses increase productivity, boost bottom lines, and manage risk.

Employers also must be familiar with any state and federal laws or collective bargaining agreements that may impact when, where, and how testing is performed. It is strongly recommended that legal counsel be sought before starting any testing program.

Drug-Free Workplace Resources

The U.S. Department of Labor's Working Partners for an Alcohol- and Drug-Free Workplace initiative raises awareness about the impact drugs and alcohol have on the workplace and provides information on how to establish drug-free workplace programs that protect worker safety and health. The program's Web site (www.dol.gov/dol/workingpartners.htm) is a central source of information about workplace drug and alcohol issues and strategies to address them.

In particular, the site's Drug-Free Workplace Advisor offers PEOs the opportunity to build tailored drug-free workplace policies by walking users through the elements of a comprehensive policy and asking them to choose the options most appropriate for a particular client (if a program is to be client-specif-

ic) or their PEO (if a program is to be PEO-wide).

Another feature of the site, the Substance Abuse Information Database (SAID), is an online repository of hundreds of documents related to workplace alcohol and drug abuse, including sample policies, surveys, research reports, training and educational materials, and legal and regulatory information.

The site also lists summaries of related state laws, community-based organizations that may assist businesses in becoming drug free, and help lines that assist individuals who have, or know someone who has, an alcohol or drug problem.

Presentations, fact sheets, and articles that can be used for training purposes or organizational publications or displays are also available.

PEOs can use Working Partners resources to help clients ensure their workplaces are drug free. All Working Partners materials are in the public domain and may be reproduced and distributed as needed. In fact, PEOs may incorporate their names and/or logos on any Working Partners materials.

Incorporating drug-free workplace services into the PEO service menu adds value well beyond the PEO-client relationship. Not only do drug-free workplaces protect worker safety and health, they also help businesses increase productivity, boost bottom lines, and manage risk. But even further, drug-free workplaces significantly contribute to the creation of drug-free families, schools, and communities. By helping spread the word about the value of such programs, PEOs have the opportunity to play an important role in the campaign to reduce alcohol and drug abuse nationwide.

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