



# Hallmarks of Successful Drug-Free Workplace Programs

**FACT SHEET**

## Characteristics of an Effective, Comprehensive Drug-Free Workplace Program

Employers who have successfully implemented drug-free workplace programs offered these suggestions to employers beginning to address possible alcohol and other drug abuse in their own organizations:

### **Think Things Through**

Starting a drug-free workplace program is not difficult, but to be successful it helps to plan carefully. It is important to think ahead, define clear goals for the program, and seek advice from other employers with experience. Learn as much as you can about existing programs and policies before you begin.

### **Involve Employees**

Work with your most valuable resource: your employees. They can help get the message out, clarify goals, and make sure the program fits into the daily reality of your workplace. Showing employees that you value their input vests them in the program and helps make it work. Most of your employees are not abusing alcohol or other drugs—they are already part of the solution.<sup>1</sup>

### **Have Clear, Written Drug-Free Workplace Policies and Procedures That Are Applied Uniformly**

Drug-free workplace programs are serious business. Protect your organization with procedural rules that are clear, fair, and consistently applied. The policy should also include provisions for appeal. With these steps in place, employees are more likely to support the program and trust that the employer will carry it out fairly.

### **Consider the Collective Bargaining Process**

Where drug testing is a mandatory subject of collective bargaining, the rules for involvement of employee representatives are clear. Even when drug testing is not subject to collective bargaining, or when it is mandated by law, discussing the drug-free workplace policy with union representatives can be quite useful.<sup>2</sup> They may have model programs or other ideas to offer, and they can be helpful in communicating program purpose, procedures, and policies to the employees they represent.<sup>3</sup>

### **Protect Confidentiality**

Employees will support and have faith in your drug-free workplace program when their confidentiality is protected. If employees choose to tell coworkers about their private concerns (such as the results of a drug test), that is their decision. However, when an employee tells you something in confidence, you are obligated to keep it between the two of you. To ensure employee support of the program and avoid legal problems, make confidentiality a priority and spell out the penalties for anyone who violates it.

### **Ensure Accurate Testing and Objective Review**

If your program includes drug testing, ensure that a) samples are correctly collected, b) the chain of custody is flawless, c) the tests are conducted by properly trained and supervised lab technicians using equipment that is appropriately maintained, d) laboratory performance and accuracy are independently reviewed, and e) results are communicated through a Medical Review Officer trained to render judgments.

### **Ask for Legal Review**

Whether you write the first draft of your policy yourself or tailor an existing policy to your needs, having your program, policy, and procedures reviewed by an attorney experienced in labor and employment matters in your State is extremely important. An attorney can advise you on any relevant State laws governing drug-free workplace programs or employer testing and on how the Americans with Disabilities Act may affect your program implementation. An attorney can also alert you as laws and regulations change over time.

### **Eliminate Stigma: Address Workplace Drug Abuse in the Context of Health, Safety, and Productivity**

Policies and programs that foster workplace substance abuse prevention and intervention are part of a larger national movement to promote the health, safety, and well-being of individuals, families, and communities and to improve health, safety, and productivity in workplaces. A drug-free workplace program that communicates care and concern for employees is more likely to succeed than one that intimidates employees.



### **Ensure Good Communication and Ongoing Review**

Successful programs ensure that managers, supervisors, union representatives, and employees are knowledgeable about their roles, rights, and responsibilities under the drug-free workplace policy. Explain your drug-free workplace program by using a variety of communication strategies. The message should be clear from the start. Effective ways to communicate include written materials, charts, meetings, question-and-answer sessions, and a suggestion box. Employers who are successful at this know it is important to repeat the message periodically, watch how the program works on a day-to-day basis, invite feedback, and revise the program as needed to meet the specific needs of the workplace.

### **Common Concerns Faced by Employers Considering Implementing a Program**

#### **Is My Organization Too Small?**

No organization is too small to be concerned about creating a workplace free of the effects of alcohol and other drug abuse. Problems related to alcohol and other drug abuse can arise in a workplace of any size, and a workplace without a policy or program is exactly where problems are likely to occur.

#### **Will a Drug-Free Workplace Program Cost Too Much Money?**

You can be part of the solution without spending a lot of money. Although smaller organizations usually have fewer resources for hiring outside trainers or for paying for treatment, they can do something. Free or low-cost assistance is often available. Implementing a drug-free workplace program in stages is another option; for example, you could begin by establishing a clear policy that defines the organization's expectations. That way, everyone knows what to do if an alcohol or other drug problem arises. The materials in this Kit offer suggestions to help you minimize the cost of a program. Finally, remember: the new drug-free program may look like a costly investment; however, in the long run, it saves many dollars for each dollar spent. For example, a large transportation company found a 27-to-1 return on investment for its program.<sup>4</sup>

#### **Will I Be Sued?**

Drug-free workplace policies, drug testing, and personnel actions that are tied to violating a drug-free workplace policy are widely accepted employment practices. As long as confidentiality is protected and the employer implements the policy fairly and consistently, the chances of being sued are minimal. Again, have your policy and procedures reviewed by an attorney who is experienced in labor and employment matters in your State—before you put the policy and program in place.

#### **Do I Need to Bother? Wouldn't I Know if Employees Were Abusing Alcohol or Other Drugs?**

Abuse and addiction are serious and complex, and they can be progressive illnesses.<sup>5</sup> You may not realize that an employee is having a problem until the later stages of the disease, since the health indicators of abuse or addiction are more apparent in the later stages. Many of those who abuse alcohol and other drugs are in denial of their problem or don't recognize it in themselves. Others are concerned about being found out and losing their jobs and their homes.

Having a program in place now can reduce costly problems in the future. In addition to all of the other health, safety, and security risks that can arise, no employer wants to be the employer of choice for people who abuse alcohol or other drugs.

#### **Will Having a Program Create Negative Attitudes Among Employees?**

Employees may be concerned and have questions about any new policy or program that their workplace introduces. Because of the sensitive nature of a drug-free workplace program, it is important to involve employees, listen to their questions and concerns, and explain why the decision has been made to implement a drug-free workplace program in the organization. Frequently, sharing how these programs increase the health of both employees and their families and possible health cost savings can be a reassuring discussion.

**References:** **1.** U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), SAMHSA, Office of Applied Studies. 2007. *Results From the 2006 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National Findings*. Rockville, Maryland, 27. **2.** Ted R. Miller, Valerie S. Nelkin, Les R. Becker, J. Crivelli, Bryon Sogie-Thomas, and Rebecca S. Spicer. 2002. "The PeerCare Program: Process Evaluation." Calverton, Maryland: Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation. Prepared under Cooperative Agreement 1-U1K-SP08096 for the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, SAMHSA, U.S. DHHS. **3.** Robert R. Bonds and Effie Bastes. 1999. "A Peer-Professional Team Intervention Approach in the Treatment of Drug and Alcohol Problems in the Workplace." Paper presented at the International Union of Railways World Conference on Occupational Health and Safety (September 23). **4.** Ted R. Miller, Eduard Zaloshnja, and Rebecca S. Spicer. 2007. "Effectiveness and Benefit-Cost of Peer-Based Workplace Substance Abuse Prevention Coupled With Random Testing." *Accident Analysis & Prevention* 39(3):565-73. **5.** Tian Dayton. 2000. *The Origins of Trauma: Trauma and Addiction: Ending the Cycle of Pain Through Emotional Literacy*. Deerfield Beach, Florida: Health Communications Inc.