Implementation Guide: How to Build, Implement, and Sustain A Drug-Free Workplace Program

Your drug-free workplace initiative can be an invaluable tool in your efforts to strengthen and protect your business and your employees from the hazards of alcohol and other drug abuse. At the same time, it can lessen organizational, social, and psychological risk factors that erode the bottom line. Employers who have implemented drug-free workplace programs report some of the benefits they have noted:

- Decreases in absenteeism, accidents, downtime, turnover, and theft; increases in productivity; overall improved morale.

- Better health status among many employees and family members and decreased use of medical benefits.

- Decreased premium costs for certain kinds of insurance, such as workers' compensation.

- Employees, employee representatives, and unions often welcome drug-free workplace programs.

- Current users of illegal drugs prefer organizations that do not have such programs.

This brochure gives an overview of the process of building, implementing, and sustaining a drug-free workplace program for your employees. It will help you create a program that is appropriate for your organization's needs and resources.

Since organizations differ greatly in size, in type, and in available resources, drug-free workplace programs are not 'one size fits all.' They range from the basics to very comprehensive efforts. There are three general types of programs:

> **Drug-free workplace programs are not one-size-fits-all.**

Type 1. Small Organizations With Low Safety/Security Risks and Employees With Few Risk Factors for Substance Abuse: A basic drug-free workplace program would include a policy and an employee assistance program (EAP) but probably would not include drug testing.

Type 2. Small or Medium-Sized Organizations With Moderate to High Safety/Security Risks or Numerous Workplace Substance Abuse Risk Factors: A drug-free workplace program might include some form of drug testing and perhaps the services of an external EAP in addition to the policy and awareness components.

Type 3. Medium to Large Organizations With Moderate to High Safety/Security Risks and Moderate to High Employee Risk Factors: A drug-free workplace program would likely include some form of drug testing, an EAP, and a fairly comprehensive health promotion/wellness program, as well as the basic awareness and policy elements.

There can be many variations on these three types of programs, as organizations tailor them to their particular needs and characteristics. Following is a stepwise approach that many different kinds of employers can use to build,

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
www.samhsa.gov

implement, and sustain drug-free workplace policies and programs that meet their specific requirements.

Building a Program

The following six steps will help you build a customized program:

1. Assess your needs.
2. Identify available resources.
3. Develop a written policy.
4. Determine whether to have an EAP.
5. Determine whether to do drug testing.
6. Plan to educate your employees and train supervisors.

Step 1. Assess Your Needs

Questions to answer as you assess your needs include

- Is yours a large organization employing individuals in safety-sensitive positions?

- Does it conduct federally funded projects?

- Is the organization in the transportation sector, with mandated drug testing requirements?

- Does the organization have a high prevalence of substance abuse problems?

- Does it employ a population of workers for whom prevention education is critical?

- Drug-free workplace policies and programs are required for organizations with federally funded projects. At minimum, a written policy, supervisor training, and employee education must be in place. Does your organization have these?

- If your organization is in a sector with mandated drug testing requirements, your policy and program must follow the requirements for testing. Does it?

Step 2. Identify Available Resources

Here are the types of resources you might inventory as part of your planning process:

- A drug-free workplace policy already in place
- A drug testing program in place
- Human resources staff in place
- A health promotion program in place
- An EAP in place

 If yours is a small to medium-sized organization, you may consider a type-1 program to begin with. If you are a larger organization, you may have resources to support a more comprehensive program for your employees (type 2 or 3).

Step 3. Develop a Drug-Free Workplace Policy

A written drug-free workplace policy is the cornerstone of an effective program. It should include

- **Rationale for the Policy**
  - The reason for the policy
  - What it is designed to do
  - How it was developed

- **Expectations and Prohibitions**
  - Employee behaviors that are expected
  - What substances and behaviors are prohibited

- **Consequences and Appeals**
  - Consequences if an employee violates the policy
  - Procedures for determining whether an employee has violated the policy
  - How appeals will be handled

- **Benefits and Assurances**
  - Efforts to help employees comply with the policy

- How requests for help will be handled
- How employee confidentiality will
  be protected
- How fairness and consistency will
  be maintained

For more help and materials on developing a drug-free workplace policy, call SAMHSA's Workplace Helpline at 1.800.WORKPLACE.

Step 4. Determine Whether or Not to Have an EAP

EAPs are programs sponsored by your business or organization—or by a union—that serve employees and their families. Their services vary across programs from those addressing only problems related to alcohol and other drug use to those covering a broad range of issues. Some programs include health and wellness activities.

All organizations should seriously consider adding the services of either an external or internal EAP. Small organizations can obtain EAP services through their health care provider by joining a consortium of small businesses to get cost-effective rates. The need for an EAP is even greater if a high proportion of your employees are at risk for a variety of social and emotional problems—not just substance abuse.

EAP services may include assessment, referral, aftercare/follow-up, management consultation, supervisory training, employee education, individual or motivational counseling, and drug-free workplace policy development and implementation.

Employee assistance programs encourage employees and family members to seek help before a problem becomes a crisis. EAP services are designed to be confidential, with confidentiality of records guaranteed.

Step 5. Determine Whether to Include Drug Testing

Drug testing is an organizational protective factor that can deter employees from coming to work unfit for duty and that can discourage alcohol and other drug abusers from joining your organization.

The first consideration regarding drug testing is to determine whether it is required for some or all of your employees. Below are some of the reasons employers give for having a drug testing program:

- To comply with Federal regulations

- To comply with customer or contract requirements

- To comply with insurance carrier requirements

- To minimize the chance of hiring employees who may be users or abusers

- To reinforce the organization's "no drug use" position

- To identify current users and abusers and refer them for assistance

- To establish grounds for discipline or firing

- To improve safety and reduce addiction

- To reduce unhealthy consequences from use of alcohol, illegal drugs, or prescription drugs

- To reduce the costs of alcohol and other drug abuse in the workplace

Employers who are required to test for drugs by one or more Federal agencies should refer to the specific regulations to determine the types of testing that are necessary. Unless drug testing is

required by law/regulation, it will likely be a mandatory subject of collective bargaining if employees are part of a union.

Step 6. Plan to Educate Employees and Train Supervisors

The employee education program component is the keystone to implementing a successful drug-free workplace program. Having a plan for introducing and explaining the drug-free workplace program to employees and for informing them about substance abuse–related issues will be important to your program's overall success.

As you plan your employee education component, make sure it is aimed at all employees and all levels of the organization. It should accomplish the following:

- Set forth the drug-free workplace policy, the program, and the rules

- Explain how to access assistance (e.g., self-refer to the EAP before problems appear on the job)

- Explain how employee performance problems will be evaluated and how referrals for assistance will be handled

- Provide details regarding circumstances, procedures, and other elements of drug testing (if the policy includes testing)

- Explain confidentiality and other employee protections in the policy

- Provide information about substance abuse such as types and effects of drugs, symptoms of use, and effects on performance

- Explain the relationship of the employee assistance program to any drug testing and to prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, and aftercare

Be sure to include an employee awareness program that communicates the hazards of substance abuse and the benefits of avoiding substance abuse. At minimum, the employee education component should also

- Provide print materials on the hazards of alcohol and drugs and misuse of prescription drugs
- Inform employees how to avoid substance abuse problems
- Provide general health promotion material on stress management, a healthy diet, and fitness as well as on alcohol and other drugs

It is highly recommended that organizations select, as resources permit, one of several evidence-based substance abuse prevention programs that present materials in the context of broader health and safety issues. The evidence-based programs are described in the "SAMHSA's NREPP Model Programs for the Workplace" section of this book.

Supervisor Training

It is recommended that companies with several or more supervisors provide them with special training to ensure that they understand the drug-free workplace policy and their particular roles in preventing and addressing workplace substance use. The depth and scope of supervisor training will grow as a function of

- Implementation of drug testing
- Substantial prevalence of substance use
- Organizational resources to support the training

Implementing a Program

This section summarizes key implementation considerations for each program component.

Employee Assistance Programs

EAPs may be internal, external, internal/external, or consortiums (among various companies). They may be management sponsored, member assistance programs provided by unions, or peer assistance programs sponsored by employers or unions. The following describes a range of implementation options:

Referral Only

These programs provide supervisors and managers with a telephone number to give to troubled employees for accessing referrals to community resources, self-help options, and substance abuse treatment providers.

In House

These types of programs have employees who specialize in crisis intervention, assessment, and referral to outside sources for assistance. They also may provide assistance to supervisors and managers in handling employee performance reviews and identifying problems.

Contract

Outside programs offer crisis intervention, short-term counseling, assessment, and referral to specialized sources of assistance with the use of a consultant or firm providing these services. This is a common model that uses highly specialized staff and services removed from the workplace.

Consortium

These programs combine employers, unions, and worksites within a defined area or specific industry to offer services—often on a more comprehensive and less expensive basis.

Mixed Model

These programs are for employers and unions with multiple worksites with different needs and resources.

EAP providers can suggest a package of services, costs, and contract options depending on your interests and needs. Information that a potential provider will need to make an offer of services generally includes

- Your drug-free workplace policy statement
- Your health benefits structure
- Information about the organization and employees (demographics, job categories, worksites, etc.)
- Services you wish to include
- A budget range for services
- Reports required

Drug Testing

An effective drug testing program needs a drug testing policy. This may be part of the organization's drug-free workplace policy, or it may be a separate document. It should be distributed to all employees. The best protection against future legal challenges is to write a policy that is as detailed and specific as possible.

The actions that will be taken in response to a positive drug test should be clearly described in the written policy. Although there are many options, common responses include referring the employee for treatment, disciplinary measures, or discharge.

Employee Education

Clearly communicating, from the beginning, the drug-free workplace program's content and importance to employees is critical to the program's success. Make sure to communicate the value the organization places on the personal health of employees, their families, and their communities. Announce (e.g., in a letter to all employees from the CEO) that having a drug-free workplace and preventing drug and alcohol problems among your employees and their families are major corporate emphases.
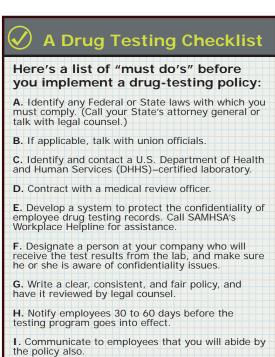
- Fully explain the benefits and procedures of your drug-free workplace program or policy to all employees.

- Communicate to your employees the potential risks that drug (including alcohol) abuse poses for businesses or organizations—and for yours in particular.

- Communicate to your employees the connection between substance abuse and health problems. Include moderate alcohol consumption guidelines for men and women. (Moderation is defined as the consumption of up to one drink per day for women and up to two drinks per day for men. Twelve fluid ounces of regular beer, 5.0 fluid ounces of wine, and 1.5 fluid ounces of 80-proof distilled spirits count as one drink each. This definition of moderation is not intended as an average over several days but rather as the amount consumed on any single day.[1])

Some of the mechanisms used by companies to provide information to employees about the drug-free workplace program, as well as about alcohol and other drugs, include the following:

- Print materials, payroll stuffers, and presentations such as brownbag luncheon presentations

- Special events such as substance abuse awareness campaigns, involving posters, and employee newsletter articles

- Health Fairs that include advertising the services of the employee assistance program to the mainstream

- Organization intranet or special Web sites (e.g., GetFit) that feature educational materials ranging from basic information to sophisticated multimedia programs

- Orientation programs for new hires

Current research indicates that integrating substance abuse prevention education, organization policy, and access to help within a broader health framework leads to greater employee interest and impact. The health context

✅ A Drug Testing Checklist

Here's a list of "must do's" before you implement a drug-testing policy:

A. Identify any Federal or State laws with which you must comply. (Call your State's attorney general or talk with legal counsel.)

B. If applicable, talk with union officials.

C. Identify and contact a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)–certified laboratory.

D. Contract with a medical review officer.

E. Develop a system to protect the confidentiality of employee drug testing records. Call SAMHSA's Workplace Helpline for assistance.

F. Designate a person at your company who will receive the test results from the lab, and make sure he or she is aware of confidentiality issues.

G. Write a clear, consistent, and fair policy, and have it reviewed by legal counsel.

H. Notify employees 30 to 60 days before the testing program goes into effect.

I. Communicate to employees that you will abide by the policy also.

of topics such as stress management, nutrition/weight management, and active lifestyle enables the organization to go a long way toward diminishing the stigma associated with seeking early assistance for a potential problem with alcohol or substance abuse.

Using Evidence-Based Prevention Interventions

Substance abuse prevention programs and strategies that have been deemed effective by SAMHSA can serve as a central part of your drug-free workplace effort. Such programs have been carefully implemented and rigorously evaluated with consistently positive outcomes. Several workplace

programs have met SAMHSA's stringent criteria and are listed below. These programs can be used to further enhance your drug-free workplace and your substance abuse prevention effort, to create a health-promoting workplace environment, and to support employee health and well-being. For more information and technical assistance, visit http://www.modelprograms.samhsa.gov/.

Coping With Work and Family Stress: A Workplace Preventive Intervention[2, 3] is a 16-session weekly group intervention designed to teach employees how to develop effective coping strategies for dealing with stressors at work and at home.

Team Awareness[4] is a six-module workplace-training program that addresses behavioral risks associated with substance abuse among employees, their coworkers, and, indirectly, their families.

The Healthy Workplace Program[5] is a set of workplace substance abuse prevention interventions that reduce unsafe drinking, illegal drug use, and prescription drug abuse while improving the health practices of adult workers.

The Wellness Outreach at Work[6] program provides comprehensive health risk-reduction services to all employees at a workplace, using health screening, follow-up, and worksite health promotion programs. Alcohol education is integrated into the context of health risk counseling.

Supervisor Training

All supervisors should be provided with basic information about the drug-free workplace program and their roles in carrying it out. This includes

- The rationale and specific details of program start-up and implementation

- The supervisor's specific responsibilities for initiating and carrying out the drug-free workplace policy and program

- How to recognize and deal with employees who have job performance problems that may or may not be related to alcohol or other drugs, including personal and family problems

Supervisor training can be provided in a variety of ways, depending on available time and resources. Organization staff can conduct the training, for example, or a consultant from a local community agency or EAP can conduct training sessions.

Sustaining the Program

The successful drug-free workplace program is an ongoing and evolving one. Sustaining the program means integrating it well into the workplace culture and environment. Keeping the program alive and responsive to changing conditions involves several steps:

1. Ensure Good Communication. 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.

2. Conduct Ongoing Review and Evaluation of Program Results. Note how the program works on a day-to-day basis, invite feedback, and revise as necessary to meet the specific needs of the workplace. Evaluate specific results. If, for example, a program goal is to lower employee absenteeism, use employee absenteeism records to establish a baseline against which you can measure the results of your program (e.g., after the program has been in place for a year). Other types of data you might want to use include tardiness, health care benefit utilization, workers' compensation claims, theft, accidents, and turnover.

3. Stay Current. Drug-free workplace programs are being studied and improved all the time. Keep current by joining local drug-free advocacy groups or coalitions. Some trade and professional associations also provide up-to-date information about drug-free workplace issues. Some employers ask an employee group to periodically review the program and suggest appropriate changes.

4. Involve the Mainstream. Some employers and unions survey their employees/members and families regarding their interest in and need for substance abuse programs as well as general wellness and health promotion education and services. Many EAPs also offer or arrange for both general and specialized employee education activities.

Other actions that employers can take to help sustain the drug-free workplace effort include the following:

- Host alcohol-free events, emphasizing the organization's commitment to preventing injuries and deaths associated with drinking and driving, especially around the holidays.

- Be a positive role model consistent with your messages to your employees.

- Sponsor or help with prevention services in your community that would benefit your employees and their families.

- Include prevention/healthy lifestyle articles in your organization newsletter.

- Appoint a corporate representative to serve on and support any local substance abuse prevention–oriented programs or community partnerships in your area.

- Encourage and support employees and their family members to ask for help. Early identification and treatment is more cost effective than unsafe working conditions and lost productivity caused by alcohol- or other drug-related problems.

References

[1] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Agriculture. 2005. *Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2005.* Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 44.

[2] David L. Snow, Suzanne C. Swan, and Leo Wilton. 2003. "A Workplace Coping-Skills Intervention to Prevent Alcohol Abuse." In Joel B. Bennett and Wayne E.K. Lehman (eds.). *Preventing Workplace Substance Abuse: Beyond Drug Testing to Wellness.* Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 57–96.

[3] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), SAMHSA, Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP). N.d. "Coping With Work and Family Stress." Rockville, Maryland. Available at http://www.theconsultationcenter.org/WFS%20SAMHSA.pdf/.

[4] U.S. DHHS, SAMHSA, CSAP. N.d. "Team Awareness." Rockville, Maryland. Available at http://www.modelprograms.samhsa.gov/pdfs/model/TeamAwareness.pdf/.

[5] U.S. DHHS, SAMHSA, CSAP. N.d. "The Healthy Workplace." Rockville, Maryland. Available at http://www.modelprograms.samhsa.gov/pdfs/model/Healthy.pdf/.

[6] U.S. DHHS, SAMHSA, CSAP. N.d. "Wellness Outreach at Work." Rockville, Maryland. Available at http://www.modelprograms.samhsa.gov/pdfs/model/Wellness.pdf/.

A Life in the Community for Everyone
SAMHSA
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services