

# SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND THE WORKPLACE SUPERVISORY TRAINING

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## Objectives:

1. To Identify Signs and Symptoms of Substance Abuse
2. To Provide Guidelines for Effective Intervention
3. To Provide Supervisory Guidelines in the Event of an Accident
4. To Review Supervisory Guidelines in the Event of Reasonable Suspicion (“For Cause Behavior”)

## Identifying Signs and Symptoms of Substance Abuse

Being able to recognize the problem early, and act, will save valuable human resources and money. This is difficult because the early signs of substance abuse blend so subtly with the array of problems managers deal with. Alcohol and other drug abuse tend to exaggerate some of the following:

### Personnel Problems

**Absenteeism - Alcohol** and other drug abusers are absent an average of two to three times more than the normal employee.

**Poor morale - Chronic** substance abuse creates wide mood swings, anxiety, depression, and agitation. Healthy employees often see the behavior of substance abusers as a safety hazard and as poor team workers.

### Production Problems

Chronic substance abuse physically and mentally affects the employee. These effects occur not only during acute intoxication (from one to 24 hours after intake), but also show up as residual hangovers, fatigue and mental impairment. Other physical and mental effects may include:

- Slow reactions
- Poor coordination
- Delayed decision making
- Confusion
- Learning difficulty
- Poor memory recall
- Loss of concentration
- Mood swings
- Resistance to authority

### Direct signs

Signs and symptoms pointing directly to serious substance abuse include:

- On-the-job drug use
- Paraphernalia: needles, balloons, aluminum foil wrappers, sniffing tools, marijuana smoking pipe and holders, drug containers obviously not used for legitimate purposes

- Drugs: bags of marijuana, small containers of tablets, capsules or powder accidentally dropped or stashed for later sale or use
- Intoxicated behavior
- Odor of marijuana smoke or alcohol
- Empty beer, wine and liquor bottles

### **Behavioral Signs (What to Look for)**

When a supervisor notes a performance or behavior problem in an employee, the following indicators may point toward possible alcohol and other drug usage.

An employee who is using alcohol or other drugs while at work may exhibit all or some of the following characteristics:

- Bloodshot or watery eyes
- Very large or very small pupils
- Runny nose or sores around the nostrils
- Bloodstains on shirtsleeves
- Wearing sunglasses indoors or in all weather
- Slurred speech or unsteady gait
- Emotional outburst, depression, anxiety or withdrawal
- Unpredictable responses to ordinary requests
- A lackadaisical “I don’t care” attitude
- Secretive behavior
- Forgetful and indecisive
- Impulsiveness, erratic work performance
- Changes in personal appearance
- Jitters, hand tremors, agitation, irritability
- Carelessness
- Sleeping on the job

Any one of these symptoms may point to many problems other than drug abuse, but when a pattern begins to develop the supervisor or manager needs to be alert and act quickly. These behaviors can lead to greater absenteeism, higher operating costs, serious production problems, and an increase in accidents and health care costs.

The temptation to steal is always present on the job. However, increasing internal theft may point to increasing drug abuse by employees.

### **Common sites for on-the-job substance abuse include, but are not limited to:**

- Lunchroom and lounge areas
- Near lunch trucks and vendors
- Parking lots and cars
- Infrequently traveled areas
- Meeting rooms
- Equipment or other out-of-the-way rooms
- Restrooms

### **Signs of Drug Sale or Group Abuse**

- Leaving the work area frequently

- Visits by strangers who have no legitimate reason for being in the work area
- Secretive phone calls
- Visiting the lounge or restroom frequently, particularly at non-break times
- Frequent trips to the car, often with other workers
- Gathering of a group of workers in an out-of-the-way spot during breaks

A manager or supervisor who witnesses some or all of these behaviors would have reasonable cause to discuss changes in behavior with the employee. If not satisfied with the responses provided by the worker, referral for assessment and/or counseling may be appropriate.

Although incidents of suspected substance abuse will not be the same, these step-by-step procedures should provide a useful guide for actions the Company must take when such incidents occur.

### **Confronting the Employee**

When an employee's behavior or performance makes confrontation necessary and you suspect there may be a substance abuse problem, follow the steps described below. The focus of the discussion must be on the behavior and the performance problems observed. Maintaining the employee's self-esteem throughout the discussion is imperative.

#### **Describe the behavior/performance problems and why they concern you.**

Describe observations you've made (*"I've noticed you have lost your temper with Bill and Tom twice in the past week..."*) or performance that has declined (*"I counted three errors this past week and four last week..."*). Leave no doubt about the performance or behavior that you are discussing. If there have been previous discussions, be sure to recap them, including any actions the employee agreed to take (*"We discussed this problem several weeks ago and you agreed that you would..."*). Emphasize the impact that the behavior or poor performance will have on the organization, and other employees. This discussion should be handled without becoming emotional, threatening, angry or accusing to the employee.

#### **Ask for, listen to and respond to the employee's reason.**

It is critical that employees be allowed the opportunity to explain their behavior. It is equally important that the supervisor listens and responds with empathy. However, it must be made clear to the employee that the problem (behavior or performance) must be corrected. The employee must accept responsibility for the problem before the supervisor moves on to the next step. If the employee fails to accept responsibility for the problem, or this discussion is the result of the employee's failure to correct the problem after previous discussions, the consequences of failing to correct or improve must be discussed. Communicating consequences is not intended to threaten or punish the employee but instead lets the employee know the importance of correcting the problem.

**Stress that the situation must change and ask what the employee will do to solve the problem.**

Emphasize that correcting the problem is not a question of “if” but rather “how” and “by when”. The problem is the employee’s. Thus, it is critical that the employee takes an active role in finding solutions. People work harder to solve problems when they have a voice in the solution. The objective here is to generate solutions. The discussion can then focus on choosing which action the employee is going to take.

**Agree on the actions the employee will use and schedule a follow-up session to review progress.**

Discuss each realistic idea and offer your recommendations for solving the problem. Your recommendations could include referring the employee to the Employee Assistance Program or Referral Provider for professional help. Once an agreement has been reached on what the employee will do to solve the problem, it is important this be documented and reviewed with the employee. Finally, agree on a specific follow-up date to review progress.

**Guidelines for Effective Documentation**

Thorough documentation is one of the primary responsibilities of the supervisor in any of these episodes. Any supervisor involved, even indirectly, should create a detailed written factual history of the incident. Accurate recall of these facts is more likely if the documentation occurs soon after the actual event. Pay particular attention to details that answer the Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How questions.

Documentation of your observations (specific behaviors) and the facts of the situation (performance data, attendance records, etc.) provide a solid base of information you can refer to during discussions with the employee. Documenting the results of discussions is equally important, as you may need to later refer to agreements and commitments made. It is also imperative that the situation be fully discussed with your Supervisor and Human Resources before taking any action.

**Supervisory Guidelines in the Event of an Incident**

If an incident occurs in which medical assistance is required, personal injury to others, damage to property, or it appears the injury will result in absence beyond the current work day and factors are present which may suggest that the employee may have been impaired, a “fitness for duty” evaluation may be appropriate.

- Make sure the medical needs of the employee are the number one priority. Determine if an ambulance is appropriate or if some other method of transportation will be adequate.
- Document the entire situation including all dialogue and the known factual details of the incident. If another supervisor makes the trip to the clinic, that person should also document his or her observations.

**Supervisory Guidelines in the Event of Reasonable Suspicion (For Cause Behavior)**

If you observe suspicious, “unfit for duty” behavior:

- Approach the employee, ask questions and observe how the employee responds/behaves.

- If you are satisfied with the response and you continue to believe the employee is “unfit”, ask the employee to accompany you to your office or a meeting place that offers privacy. Find another supervisor to accompany you when meeting with the employee.
- Continue questioning the employee about the “unfit” behavior observed (e.g., Why do you appear drowsy? Why are your eyes dilated? Etc.).
- Confer privacy with the other supervisor. Allow this supervisor to also conduct a fitness-for-duty observation/evaluation.
- Confer with the department manager responsible for administrative review.
- If you believe the individual to be “unfit for duty,” suspend the employee from his/her work activity. This decision does not require concurrence of another supervisor/manager.
- If alcohol/drug testing is appropriate, initiate process.
- Offer them transportation alternatives.
- If the employee insists on driving, tell the employee that local law enforcement officer’s will be contacted if they drive off the company premises.
- Tell them when to call in or report in (usually start of the next workday).
- If the employee drives off the premises, contact law enforcement officers.
- Write up the facts of the situation. Do not include conjecture or the opinions of others.
- Contact your Supervisor and Human Resources and present information.
- Possible charges in such cases include violation of safety rules, reporting for work in an unfit condition, insubordination, or being under the influence of alcohol or other drugs.

**CAUTION: In a situation requiring the steps listed above:**

- Do not attempt to physically restrain the employee
- Do not accuse the employee of being on drugs or alcohol or being drunk. Focus on the observable, “unfit” behavior.
- Do not confront the employee in the presence of fellow employees.
- Do not diagnose the nature of the employee’s problem. Be accurate in what you say and what you write. Record only objective facts.
- Do not procrastinate in writing up the incident. A “fresh” memory is always the best.
- Do not record opinions or conjecture, only the facts.
- Do not tell anyone who does not “need to know” of the incident.

**Talk with your employees before it’s too late.**

Addressing the issue is the best thing to do for both the company and for the chemically dependent person. When an employer moves to take action with a troubled employee, the rate of recovery is highest. The important thing to remember is to act sensitively but firmly.

Use the Substance Abuse Investigation Form to assist with the Reasonable Suspicion and Incident Guidelines

**North Dakota State University**  
**SUBSTANCE ABUSE INVESTIGATION**  
**REASONABLE SUSPICION AND INCIDENT GUIDELINES**

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This form shall be completed and signed by the person suspecting another employee of drug and/or alcohol abuse during working hours, on company property, or on company business, unless otherwise stated in the NDSU Policy #155: *Alcohol and Other Drugs: Unlawful and Unauthorized Use by Students and Employees*. Check all signs and symptoms that apply and complete the related questions. This form is to be reviewed by the employee's supervisor/manager to determine if testing is warranted. The suspecting employee and his/her supervisor will sign, date, and forward the form to the appropriate personnel.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Department \_\_\_\_\_ Empl ID \_\_\_\_\_

**Physical Signs or Symptoms**

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Possessing, dispensing, or using prohibited substances
2. \_\_\_\_\_ Slurred or incoherent speech
3. \_\_\_\_\_ Unusual, unsteady gait or other loss of physical control, poor coordination
4. \_\_\_\_\_ Dilated or constricted pupils or unusual eye movement
5. \_\_\_\_\_ Bloodshot or watery eyes
6. \_\_\_\_\_ Extreme fatigue or sleeping on the job
7. \_\_\_\_\_ Excessive sweating or clamminess of skin
8. \_\_\_\_\_ Flushed or very pale face
9. \_\_\_\_\_ Highly excited or nervous
10. \_\_\_\_\_ Recurrent nausea or vomiting
11. \_\_\_\_\_ Odor of alcohol, marijuana or other drugs
12. \_\_\_\_\_ Disheveled appearance or out of uniform (bloodstains on shirtsleeves)
13. \_\_\_\_\_ Dry mouth (frequent swallowing/lip wetting)
14. \_\_\_\_\_ Dizziness or fainting
15. \_\_\_\_\_ Unusual shaking hands or body tremors/twitching
16. \_\_\_\_\_ Breathing irregularity or difficulty breathing
17. \_\_\_\_\_ Runny nose or sores around nostrils not associated with other respiratory infection symptoms
18. \_\_\_\_\_ Puncture marks or "tracks"
19. \_\_\_\_\_ Inappropriate wearing of sunglasses
20. \_\_\_\_\_ Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**General Job Performance**

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Excessive unauthorized absences – number in the last 12 months \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_ Frequent Monday/Friday absence or other patterns
3. \_\_\_\_\_ Increase concern about, or actual incidents of safety offenses involving the employee (cite examples on back of sheet)
4. \_\_\_\_\_ Inability to follow through on job performance recommendations
5. \_\_\_\_\_ Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**Personal Matters**

- 1. \_\_\_\_\_ Changes in or unusual speech (incoherent, stuttering, loud)
- 2. \_\_\_\_\_ Changes in or unusual physical mannerisms (gestures, posture)
- 3. \_\_\_\_\_ Changes in or unusual level of activity: much reduced \_\_\_ or increased \_\_\_
- 4. \_\_\_\_\_ Increasingly irritable or tearful
- 5. \_\_\_\_\_ Unpredictable or out-of-context displays of emotion
- 6. \_\_\_\_\_ Episodes of unusual fear or paranoia
- 7. \_\_\_\_\_ Lacks appropriate caution
- 8. \_\_\_\_\_ Engages in detailed discussion about obtaining selling or using drugs
- 9. \_\_\_\_\_ Makes unfounded accusations toward others, has feelings of persecution
- 10. \_\_\_\_\_ Secretive behavior
- 11. \_\_\_\_\_ Memory problems (difficulty recalling instructions, data, past behaviors, delayed decision making)
- 12. \_\_\_\_\_ Makes unreliable or false statements
- 13. \_\_\_\_\_ Unrealistic self-appraisal or grandiose statements
- 14. \_\_\_\_\_ Temper tantrums or angry outbursts
- 15. \_\_\_\_\_ Major change in physical health with no known cause
- 16. \_\_\_\_\_ Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**Written Summary**

Please summarize the facts and circumstances of the incident, employee response, supervisor actions taken, and any other pertinent information not previously noted. Please attach any additional documentation related to this reasonable suspicion.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Employee Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date/Time

\_\_\_\_\_  
Supervisor's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date/Time

\_\_\_\_\_  
Manager/Human Resource Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date/Time