

Worksite: _____ Instructor: _____ Date/Time: _____

Topic C036: Drugs & Alcohol

Introduction: Substance abuse and alcohol use are spinning out of control in today's American workplaces. Upwards of ten percent of all employees have problems with chemical dependency. Substance abuse and/or addiction in the workplace is extensive, affecting every industry, at all employee levels, and is a situation that will not solve itself. Any person who is impaired while on the job is a clear threat to themselves or to any coworker in the near vicinity. Customers and vendors are also affected when product quality and delivery schedules are not maintained due to worker impairment.

Untreated chemical dependency can be very expensive to a company and the economy. Government studies estimate the nationwide losses in productivity, profits, and overall performance exceeds \$100 billion annually. Abusers/addicts will often sacrifice their careers, families, health, and sometimes even their lives to the disease. The suffering also extends to their families, fellow workers, and friends. People caught in abuse/addiction lose their good judgment, self-control, dignity, and self-respect.

Substance abuse among U.S. workers has been linked to a host of economic, social, and public health problems. Current research indicates that nearly seventy-five percent of illegal drug users are employed in full and part-time jobs. Consequently, when the effects of alcohol abuse are added, the result is a large impaired portion of the national workforce. For the typical employer, that means unhealthy employees, unsafe working conditions, loss of productivity, smaller profits, more accidents, higher medical claims expenses, and a host of other negative effects for the employer and the employees.

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Though difficult to compute, the costs of alcohol and drug abuse, both in the workplace and in society at large, are always alarmingly high. Many types of expenses an employer faces are:

- *Administrative losses*, e.g., absenteeism, tardiness, overtime pay, sick leave abuse, health insurance claims, disability payments, and costs associated with accidents.
- *Hidden losses*, e.g., diverted supervisory and managerial time, friction among workers, material waste, equipment damage, poor decisions, and damage to public image.
- *Losses with legal implications*, e.g., Workers' Compensation, drug trafficking on the job, disciplinary actions, grievances, threat to public safety, and worksite security.
- *Costs of employee health insurance* and other health care services.

Efforts to address employee performance problems, including those related to alcohol and, later, to drugs have been ongoing for several decades. Employers have long realized an important relationship between the worker and the worker's life, i.e., that drug and alcohol problems caused serious family quarrels and had an immediate negative effect on work performance.

As employers began to understand that healthy, happy, and sober employees turn out the best products, these early efforts evolved into what are known today as Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) which, in addition to alcohol and drug abuse, address a variety of other employee problems that can affect performance on the job. These programs give life to the belief that employees can help themselves by working together to overcome substance abuse problems in the workplace. Health maintenance organizations (HMOs) also recognize the important relationship between worker health and productivity and many provide EAP benefits in their health coverage.

Conclusion: For many years, chemical dependency has been recognized as a treatable disease by the American Medical Association (AMA). If you, a friend, or a co-worker is wrestling with substance addiction, seek help. An excellent source of information for help: National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence Hope Line (800) NCA-CALL.

Employee Attendance: (Names or signatures of personnel who are attending this meeting)

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