

Supervisor Training: Substance Abuse

Why should you train your supervisors?

Supervisors are the foundation upon which a successful drug-free workplace program is implemented and administered because they work most closely with employees. It is critically important that supervisors are prepared for the new role and responsibilities they will have under a drug-free workplace program.

Safety: Employees in drug-free environments have greater confidence that their workplaces are safe and are oftentimes more productive.

Liability: If an employee is injured at work or injures a coworker your company may be liable. It is better to deal with the problem up front instead of waiting on it to cause so serious damage.

Helping Employees: If the supervisor is available to assist the employee in a professional yet caring manner, the employee will get the help he/she needs and the company may save some money in the long run.

Employee Discipline: In some cases employees must be disciplined. A well developed program helps supervisors stay out of the gray areas. Employees are required to abide by the policy.

What should your supervisor training include?

At a minimum, supervisor training should include a review of:

- The rationale and specific details of the program startup and implementation
- The supervisor's specific responsibilities in implementing the policy
- Ways to recognize and deal with employees who have job performance problems that could be related to alcohol and other drugs.

What are the supervisor's responsibilities?

Supervisor's responsibilities should include:

- Monitoring employees' job performance
- Staying alert to performance problems
- Documenting performance problems
- Enforcing the policy

What is NOT expected of the supervisor?

- Diagnose alcohol and drug related problems
- Provide substance abuse counseling or therapy to employees
- Have all the answers
- Be a police officer

If a supervisor suspects an alcohol, drug related, or other problem, particularly as evidenced by poor job performance or conduct, the employee should be referred for a professional evaluation and assistance.

How do I provide supervisor training?

Supervisor training can be provided in a variety of ways, depending on available time and resources.

These can include:

- Training the supervisors yourself. The U.S. Department of Labor and SAMHSA Division of Workplace Programs are great places to get information.
- Have a consultant from a local community agency such as The Council on Drug & Alcohol Abuse or an Employee Assistance Program conduct the training. They may offer a more interactive approach to the training.

For supervisors to effectively carry out your substance abuse policy, there must be a source of help to which they can turn. Who provides that help may depend on the size of the company and how you have set up your program. For example, if your company has few employees, problems may be referred directly to you as the employer. If you have an internal or outside employee assistance service, supervisors would be instructed to refer matters to that person.

In order to have an effective drug-free workplace program supervisors **MUST** believe in the importance and effectiveness of the program. Employers should hold meeting with supervisors, offer training, workshops and follow up sessions to continually stress the importance of a drug-free workplace program.

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