

## Some points on Alcohol and Drug Abuse at the Workplace to ponder upon. For you the employer.

The basic philosophy of workplace substance abuse prevention programmes is that substance abuse is a preventable disease, which affects the individual physically, mentally and socially. By making prevention a focus at the workplace, fewer workers will develop substance abuse problems. Prevention initiatives emphasise worker health, well-being and safety. Introducing a prevention programme benefits the enterprise.

Among the most substances of abuse is alcohol. Epidemiological studies have demonstrated that the incidence of alcohol problems is correlated to the amount of alcohol consumed; the greater the consumption the greater number of problems in co-worker relationships, absenteeism, accidents, violence and harassment.<sup>1</sup> Many jobs require attention to security and safety; employees are required to work together. They have to rely on each other. Every employee's actions have effects on other employees. Substance abuse rarely occurs in isolation, coworkers can be effected and they can play a role in enabling the problem or alternatively encourage peers to get help

The number of workers who occasionally drink to excess far outnumbers the heavy and dependent drinkers. The total number of alcohol related incidents caused by moderate or occasional drinkers are greater than the total number of incidents caused by heavy or dependent drinkers. The work environment is far from being immune to problems related to Alcohol and Drug misuse or other addictive behaviours. As pressures at work mount, so does the need for relaxation during holidays and weekends. Unfortunately not all employees have "positive" outlets for relaxation and there is a tendency that relaxation over the weekend could lead to certain lifestyles that are not conducive to the welfare of the employees and their families.

### ***Policy review***

Employers realise that it is their responsibility together with that of their employees, to establish a workplace that feels safe. An individual's alcohol or drug problem does not effect only himself/herself. The people they work with would probably have noticed signs that there is a problem and they may have had to cope with the consequences. Some employees cover for the person at times doing his/her work, cover for his/her absenteeism, or deteriorating co-worker relationships. Unfortunately these behaviours are uncovered when it is too late or when a crisis is at hand. Many employers and employees are caught in such situations because many do not have a well defined Alcohol and Drug Workplace Policy. The management cannot handle such situations confidently if they do not have a set of procedures to apply in such situations.

**sedqa** is working in liaison with unions so that eventually the latter will help the employer to establish, announce and enforce a general policy with respect to drug and alcohol abuse at the workplace.

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<sup>1</sup> International Labour Organisation 2003 *Alcohol and Drug problems at work: the shift to prevention*.  
International Labour office Geneva

This latter objective could be made as realistic as possible through the implementation of the S.A.F.E. (Substance Abuse Free Employees) Primary Prevention Programme within your enterprise.

For more information kindly contact the Primary Prevention Team on tel: 21 244226.