Be Straight and Sober for Work



Behind the wheel, behind the desk, or on the shop floor, substance abuse can kill. For example, a construction worker who was impaired by alcohol fell to his death through a floor opening.

Many jobs require alertness, accuracy and quick reflexes. When something interferes with those abilities, the results can be devastating.

Substance abuse can significantly hamper a person’s performance. So why do people abuse alcohol and drugs? There are many reasons. Job-related factors can include:

- High stress
- Low satisfaction
- Long hours or irregular shifts
- Fatigue
- Repetitive duties
- Periods of boredom
- Isolation
- Remote or irregular supervision

The aftereffects of substance abuse can also diminish job performance. Preoccupation with the habit can interfere with attention to the job. There’s also the possibility of illegal activity with the sale of illicit drugs to other employees.

Substance abuse causes higher accident, fatality and absenteeism rates, in addition to loss of production, faulty decision-making and poor morale.

To deal with their problem, abusers must acknowledge the problem exists, and be willing to do something about it. Some companies might respond simply by firing the abuser, while others are more willing to help troubled employees, either directly or through referral to community services.

Employees aren’t doing anyone any favors by ignoring co-workers who are impaired by alcohol or drugs. Compare that to ignoring a defective tool or piece of equipment; most workers would report that immediately.

But very often when someone is suspected of drinking or doing drugs at the wrong time, in the wrong place, nothing is said. The silence is often due to our desire to avoid conflict or difficulty with someone we work with.

Who picks up the slack for this person and runs the risk of injury or death because he or she can’t function properly? Co-workers do.

You have a responsibility to talk to your supervisor about anything that affects the safe performance of your job. It can be tough, but if you honestly believe a certain individual has a drug or alcohol problem, report it. Your actions may help the employee beat a terrible addiction. More importantly, your actions could save his or her life.

Do everyone a favor, especially the substance abuser. Report such incidents and situations before someone else is harmed.