

Workers' guide: Alcohol and drug awareness for employers

Supplementary information

Canadian Model for Providing a Safe Workplace – Version 6.0 – July 1, 2018

The purpose of the Canadian Model for Providing a Safe Workplace (Canadian Model) is to contribute to a safe workplace for all workers by reducing the risks associated with the inappropriate use of alcohol and drugs. This supplementary information is intended to help create awareness and enhance understanding of the Canadian Model. If there is any lack of clarity or apparent conflict between the supplementary information and the Canadian Model, the terms of the Canadian Model Version 6.0 shall prevail. For more information, visit coaa.ab.ca and EnergySafetyCanada.com.

Background

The Canadian construction, maintenance, and oil and gas industries are committed to ensuring a safe work environment for all workers, free from alcohol and drugs. To maintain this commitment, a group of stakeholders came together in 1998 to develop the Canadian Model for Providing a Safe Workplace.

Since it was first issued in 1999, the Canadian Model has been revised and further enhanced numerous times based on experience, new information and the emerging law and public policy in this area.

The Canadian Model establishes standardized alcohol and drug guidelines and a policy that will ensure fairness and consistency throughout the industry. It also helps to standardize the approach, testing, application and rehabilitation of workers.

The intent of this awareness package is to help workers understand the alcohol and drug guidelines and work rule and their role in ensuring its success.

Roles and responsibilities of workers

The successful implementation of the Canadian Model is the shared responsibility of owner companies, contractors, workers and labour providers. As part of this shared responsibility, workers must:

- Have an understanding of the alcohol and drug work rule
- Take responsibility for ensuring their own safety and the safety of others
- Ensure they comply with the work standards as part of their obligation to perform work activities in a safe manner
- Comply with the alcohol and drug work rule and follow appropriate treatment if deemed necessary
- Use medications responsibly, be aware of potential side effects and notify their supervisor of any potential unsafe side effects where applicable
- Encourage their peers or co-workers to seek help before there is a potential breach or breach of policy.

Alcohol and drug guidelines

The alcohol and drug guidelines are based on four fundamental principles:

- **Shared responsibility for safety**
Both individuals and companies in the Canadian construction, maintenance, and oil and gas industries have a shared responsibility for safety in the workplace. The *Occupational Health and Safety Act* of Alberta imposes a legal obligation on all workers to protect the health and safety of themselves and other workers.
- **Behaviour on and off the job**
By necessity, given the nature of operations in the construction, maintenance, and oil and gas industries, workers must have regard to conduct or behaviour on and off the job that may adversely affect their ability to safely perform their duties at work. This specifically extends to the consumption or use of alcohol and drugs as addressed by the Canadian Model.
- **Balancing the needs of safety and individual rights**
The interests of ensuring safety in the workplace and respecting the rights of all workers are given equal consideration. For example, the Canadian Model balances human rights protecting individuals with disabilities (including alcohol and drug addiction) by providing for assessment, rehabilitation and return-to-work processes. The Canadian Model also balances privacy concerns by ensuring that any information collected is used solely for the reasonable purpose for which it was collected.
- **Encourage worker self-referral**
Workers who feel they may be experiencing problems associated with alcohol or drug use should voluntarily seek help under an employee assistance services program that has been identified or put in place by the company, labour provider, employer organization or worker association.

Common definitions and important concepts

Definitions

- **Addiction**
Traditionally, this term has been synonymous with physical dependence and full-fledged withdrawal symptoms. Addiction may be characterized by one or more of the following: change in tolerance, loss of control, blackouts, physical complications, psychological symptoms, and social or family complications.
- **Dependency**
There are two components involved with the concept of drug dependency:
 - **Physical** – The user's body has become so accustomed to the presence of the drug that when it is no longer used, withdrawal symptoms occur
 - **Psychological** – Users believe that they cannot function without the drug and persistently crave it to maintain their reduced anxiety (for instance).
- **Drugs**
Any substance, chemical or agent the use or possession of which is unlawful in Canada or requires a personal prescription or authorization from a licensed treating physician, or the use of which is regulated by legislation such as marijuana/cannabis, or any other psychoactive substance, and any non-prescription medication lawfully sold in Canada, and drug paraphernalia.

- **Employee assistance services**
Services that are designed to help employees and their families who are experiencing personal problems such as alcohol and drug abuse. These are also organizations that have the ability to put a rehabilitation program in place. Examples include employee assistance programs (EAP) and employee and family assistance programs (EFAP).
- **Rehabilitation program**
A program tailored to the needs of an individual, which may include education, counselling and residential care, offered to assist a person to comply with the alcohol and drug work rule.
- **Tolerance**
An adaptation of the body to the presence of a drug. When tolerance occurs, the body requires greater amounts of the drug to produce the same effect.

What is enabling?

While we may genuinely want to help a worker with an alcohol or drug problem, often by our actions or inaction we allow the problem to continue unaddressed. Many motives may prevent or deter us from addressing alcohol or drug related performance problems. One of the most common is protecting the worker from potential consequences of his or her actions, such as loss of employment or damage to the worker's reputation and self-esteem. This is called enabling.

Enabling is an easy trap to fall into, particularly when it involves performance issues in a team. First, there is comfort in numbers, which causes us to wait for someone else in the team to raise or address the issue. Second, as social beings we naturally avoid conflict. Ignoring the situation is a common avoidance method. Another is to defer dealing with it by making adjustments and compromises, hoping it will somehow resolve itself without conflict or our involvement.

Ironically, by not dealing directly with the issue, we may be exposing the worker, other team members and ourselves to even greater consequences (namely injury or death) when a performance issue becomes a safety issue. Also, we prevent the worker from taking the steps necessary to resolve the problem and from experiencing the associated learning and development to help reduce the risk of reoccurrence.

Breaking the cycle of enabling

When performance issues arise in a team, and in particular when those performance issues relate to a team member's use of alcohol or drugs, it is important for the team members to avoid enabling behaviours by:

- Recognizing that enabling behaviours do not solve performance issues, instead enabling behaviours allow performance issues to continue and often result in them worsening
- Realizing that the sooner performance issues are addressed (particularly sensitive ones) the easier they are to resolve
- Remembering that everyone on the team, including the worker with the performance problem, shares a common objective – creating a healthy and safe team environment.

Returning to work

People who have experienced negative effects from their use of alcohol or drugs may develop problems in many areas. For some, social and family relationships have suffered, while others have experienced financial, legal or physical health problems. Such individuals may be in the process of making a number of major lifestyle changes to overcome these effects. These changes will not occur overnight and family, social and work expectations and relationships need to be re-negotiated and re-defined. The first several weeks of a worker's return to work are crucial in setting a tone and atmosphere of cooperation and support.

What is a relapse?

Most people who have experienced problems from their alcohol or drug use may return to drinking or drug use, not because they want to but because they perceive themselves as having no other acceptable choices. Relapse indicates that the individual has not yet developed alternatives to the harmful behaviour for dealing with day-to-day stresses. Seventy-six per cent of relapses occur when individuals are trying to cope with negative emotional states such as loneliness, anger and boredom, many of which may have been contributing factors in the individual's initial use of alcohol or drugs.

Signs of a potential relapse may include emotional outbursts, physical and social isolation, irritation with friends and co-workers, interruption of daily routines, open rejection of help, and premature quitting of counselling or attendance at self-help groups.

Access to help or support

It is important to recognize that team members do not have all the answers and may require help or support from other resources. Regardless of whether you are a worker experiencing a problem or a concerned co-worker or supervisor, there are a number of resources and/or support systems that can assist you in addressing alcohol or drug related concerns.

Employee assistance services

Workers are encouraged to seek help for any alcohol or drug related problem from an employee assistance services program that has been identified by the company. Workers can contact employee assistance services on their own, or with the assistance of their manager, supervisor, leader, human resources representative or occupational health centre if one has been established. In addition to providing counselling and referral services to workers and family members who are experiencing problems, employee assistance services can also provide assistance to co-workers who may be concerned about a worker's behaviour but are unsure about what to do.

Helpful literature on a wide variety of health, behavioural and lifestyle concerns is available through employee assistance services programs and numerous effective third-party resources are available online. Information will typically be mailed on a personal and private basis as requested by workers or family members.