



## Safety Topic: Substance Abuse

With an ongoing pandemic, there are several factors that have changed the dynamic of both our work, and our safety culture. During 2020, workers were forced to work from home for weeks and months, some never returning. Many of our children stopped attending in-person classes and extracurricular activities all but ceased in most states. Unfortunately, another change we saw as a nation was an increase in substance abuse. It is important to understand how those changes have impacted employees', their loved ones, as well as the associated risks and costs to our workplace environment.

It is estimated that American companies spend \$81 billion annually on workplace substance abuse. This number is based on several different factors. Statistics show that these numbers are associated with both direct and indirect costs. Traditionally, these costs have proven difficult to measure. Some of these costs can be quite obvious, while others seem to have a lingering effect for days, sometimes months.

### Substance Abuse Statistics

#### Direct Cost and Indirect Cost

- Safety (workplace incidents including fatalities)
- Absenteeism/sick leave/turnover
- Loss of production
- Workplace violence and harassment
- Tardiness/sleeping on the job
- Theft
- Poor decision-making
- Lower morale

#### Workplace Incidents

The likelihood of workplace incidents skyrockets when employees are under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Drinking on the job can even lead to aggravated assault and sexual battery charges.

*Approximately 16% of emergency room patients injured at work have alcohol in their system.*

Source:

<https://www.addictioncenter.com/addiction/workplace/>

### Signs of Workplace Substance Abuse and Addiction

Most sufferers hide their substance abuse use from their employers and coworkers. However, there are some signs that could indicate a problem. These include:

- Blaming coworkers or others at the workplace for their own personal mistakes
- Openly discussing personal financial problems
- A decline in personal appearance or hygiene
- Complaints of failing relationships at home

- Take time off from work for a vague illness or family problems.

### Treatment

Employees may be reluctant to take time off work to seek out treatment programs voluntarily. However, there are many different types of outpatient treatment programs offered in communities. Different types of outpatient treatment programs are offered to working employees to better allow individuals to recover while also maintaining some level of normalcy at work. Employees may feel ashamed or embarrassed to have to take leave to attend a treatment program.

Most companies enroll in an employee assistance program that is a national initiative of the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence. Employee assistance programs can direct substance abuse sufferers and their loved ones toward community resources available for treatment and support services.



For additional resources, please visit the links below:

<https://www.addictioncenter.com/addiction/workplace/>

<https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline>

<https://www.drugabuse.gov/>