



Supervisor Newsletter

Preventing Impaired Driving: The Supervisor's Role

While there are public health and public safety messages about the dangers of drunk and drugged driving, it is also important for supervisors at U.S. companies to do their part to prevent the operation of company vehicles under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Impaired driving by employees exposes the company to liability under tort, workers' compensation, and other laws.

In addition to legal liability, each time an employee is involved in an impaired-driving crash, companies also pay in the form of increased absenteeism and use of healthcare benefits. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the cost of traffic-related crashes to businesses is an estimated \$55 billion each year in direct costs, lost time, and workers' compensation.

Additionally, if an employee causes a crash or is arrested for impaired driving—even if a crash did not occur—administrative and legal procedures such as court time and traffic school will require further time away from work. There is also the emotional strain and decreased morale employees experience when a coworker suffers a severe injury or dies—two regrettable, but not uncommon, outcomes of impaired driving.

Helping Employees

For many employees, driving is the most dangerous work activity they do, and work-related automobile crashes contribute to more accidental deaths and serious injuries

than all other work activities. Mixing alcohol and/or drugs with driving substantially increases an employee's risk of injury or death. Drug and alcohol use impairs judgment, making drivers over-confident and more likely to take risks. It slows their reaction time, increases stopping distances, affects judgment of speed and distance, and reduces the field of vision. Any amount of illegal drugs, and even a small amount of alcohol—well below the legal limit—seriously affects the ability to drive safely.

Supervisors can help employees avoid crashes and injuries on the road by making sure all workers understand that they are expected to drive safely, responsibly, and legally.

Companies that maintain drug free workplace programs already have effective channels for supervisors to send messages about the dangers of drunk and drugged driving. Related messages can be incorporated into regular employee education sessions, training newsletters, payroll stuffers, and workplace posters and displays.

Raising awareness is the most important thing a supervisor can do to prevent impaired driving. Employees should be made aware of, and be periodically reminded of:

- Laws about drinking and drugged driving.
- The effects of alcohol, including the morning-after effect.
- Company policies on substance abuse and safe driving practices.

- The importance of asking a doctor or pharmacist if medication might affect driving.
- Actions to take if they feel their driving may be affected by medication.
- Help that is available for employees with drinking or drug problems.

Supervisors can also play a critical role in preventing impaired driving by recognizing its connection to alcoholism and by encouraging workers who have alcohol problems to seek help. If the company offers Employee Assistance Program (EAP) services, the EAP can help an employee address an alcohol or drug problem. The EAP can also help an employee determine what to do if someone in his/her family or workgroup has a substance abuse problem. If EAP services are not available, supervisors can still provide support for employees with alcohol and drug problems. Companies can maintain a resource file from which employees can access information about local counselors and treatment facilities that specialize in drug and alcohol problems, and managers can ensure that all employees are aware of and have access to the list.

It is always good for employees and the company when businesses offer coverage for substance abuse treatment within group health benefits. Doing so will reduce overall healthcare costs, since individuals who have substance use disorders

and their family members tend to use health benefits more than those who do not. It is also best in the long run, whenever possible, for supervisors to offer reasonable time off when an employee requires treatment.

Enforcing Rules

Supervisors should review the company's existing drug free workplace policy to understand how it encompasses driving, and make sure that all employees are aware of the rules. Workers should be helped to understand that they must not drive at work if their ability to do so is affected by alcohol, drugs, or medicines, and violating this policy should be a serious disciplinary matter.

It should be made clear to employees that alcohol (or drugs) cannot be consumed on duty, even if entertaining clients. Remind employees that they should not drink at lunchtime—as it takes hours for the body to get rid of alcohol, and they can still be impaired long after the last drink.

Supervisors should of course also lead by example in the way they drive themselves, and in encouraging employees to drive safely.

It is important for supervisors to recognize that they have a vested interest in preventing impaired driving for a range of reasons, in addition to lessening liability and making their communities safer for their friends and families and those of their employees. Put simply: helping to prevent impaired driving is good for business.

To help us combat substance abuse, go to www.LiveDrugFree.org and click on "Donate!"