



Supervisor Newsletter

Drug- and Alcohol-Related Violence at Work

Assaults are the fourth leading cause of work-related deaths, and individuals with anger problems are more likely to commit acts of violence when under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

Substance abuse has a direct effect on physical and cognitive functioning, contributing to violence by reducing self-control and the ability to process information and recognize warning signs. This is yet another reason that drug free workplace programs are an important part of keeping the workplace safe.

According to the National Safety Council, both fatal and nonfatal work-related assault injuries are on the rise. In 2016, assaults resulted in 500 fatalities (an increase of 83 cases from 2015) and 16,890 injuries and illnesses involving days away from work.

Assaults are categorized as intentional injury inflicted by another person, and include several types of events:

- Intentional shooting by another person
- Stabbing, cutting, slashing, or piercing
- Hitting, kicking, beating, and shoving
- Strangulation
- Bombing and arson
- Rape and sexual assault
- Threats and verbal assault

As employers and supervisors learn more about the role that drug and alcohol abuse plays in workplace violence, preventing substance abuse-related violence at work becomes more of a priority.

Substance Abuse and Violent Acts

Drug and alcohol use can facilitate aggression and hamper a person's ability to avoid violence. The role of substance abuse in violent acts extends across many forms of violence—including youth violence, sexual assault violence, child and elder abuse, and violence in the workplace.

One of the most overlooked risks surrounding long-term drug and alcohol abuse lies in its potential to give rise to angry, irrational, and potentially violent behavior in individuals who struggle with the issue.

The consequences of violence to victims can be devastating, and the involvement of drugs and alcohol in violence increases both the aggression involved in assaults and the severity of injuries sustained.

But the fear of—and impact of—drug-related violence extends far beyond the physical, emotional, and psychological damage to victims. Frequent acts of public violence can damage efforts to generate business and tourism, reduce the use of public transportation, and limit outdoor activities of children and adults.

Preventable Injuries and Deaths

Every year more than one million people worldwide lose their lives through violence, and in most countries half of all violent deaths occur when either or both the perpetrator and victim have been drinking. The National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD) reports that about 3 million violent crimes occur each year in which victims perceive the offender to have been drinking.

It is sad and unfortunate that the damage caused by alcohol and drug abuse is often not suffered by the addict, but by his or her child, spouse, friend, or coworker.

The majority of these injuries and deaths of innocent victims could have been prevented if substance abuse had been eliminated or reduced.

Violent DUI Crashes

Drinking and drugged driving of company vehicles is another form of substance abuse-related violence in the workplace, and DUI/DWI is the number one cause of death and injury of young people under the age of 21. Almost 40% of all traffic fatalities are alcohol-related, and drugs other than alcohol are involved in about 18% of motor vehicle deaths.

Innocent people are killed or injured daily due to DUI crashes, and an average of one drunk driving fatality occurs every 39 minutes.

If an employee is under the influence of drugs or alcohol and injures someone in a DUI crash, a jury will be asked to not only fully compensate the victim(s), but will also be asked to punish the drunk driver and to hold the employer financially responsible for the harm caused. How is having employees who operate company vehicles while impaired a good thing for business?

Dealing With the Problem at Work

Drug- and alcohol-related violence causes untold damage to people's lives and to

society. With 70% of drug users being employed, one out of ten people in the U.S. having an alcohol problem, and half of all violence being linked to alcohol, addressing the problem in the workplace is critically important.

Drug- and alcohol-related violence in the workplace takes many forms—from raised voices, profanity, and intimidation to sexual harassment, larceny, robbery, and assault and battery. Preventing these negative effects of drug- and alcohol-related violence at work requires a comprehensive drug free workplace program that is supported and enforced by all supervisors.

Additionally, the risk of assault can be prevented or minimized if managers take appropriate precautions. One of the best protections supervisors can offer their workers is to establish a zero-tolerance policy toward workplace violence. This policy should cover all workers, visitors, contractors, vendors, and anyone else who may come in contact with company personnel.

A well-written and implemented workplace violence prevention program, combined with a comprehensive drug free workplace program, can substantially reduce the incidence of workplace violence in companies. And it is critically important, of course, for supervisors to ensure that all workers know the policies and understand that drug and alcohol use in the workplace is not allowed, and that all claims of workplace violence will be investigated and remedied promptly.

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