

## **PRESENTER'S GUIDE**

# **"DEALING WITH DRUG AND ALCOHOL ABUSE... FOR EMPLOYEES IN CONSTRUCTION ENVIRONMENTS"**

**Part of the Construction Safety Kit Series**

# **OUTLINE OF MAJOR PROGRAM POINTS**

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The following outline summarizes the major points of information presented in the program. The outline can be used to review the program before conducting a classroom session, as well as in preparing to lead a class discussion about the program.

- **Most people have had too much to drink at least once in their lives.**
  - They often don't realize the real danger that drinking alcohol, or using drugs, can present.
  - They start out thinking that they're in complete control, only to find themselves ruled by the substances that they use.
  
- **The term "substance abuse" can mean the:**
  - Overuse of alcohol.
  - Misuse of over-the-counter medications and prescription drugs.
  - Use of illegal drugs.
  
- **It can also involve inhaling or "huffing" chemicals, such as solvents, lighter fluid, and glue, or eating "magic mushrooms" and other toxic plants.**
  
- **Substances that produce a "high" affect how the central nervous system functions.**
  - Depressants, such as alcohol, marijuana and tranquilizers, slow down brain activity.
  - Stimulants, including cocaine, crack and methamphetamine, speed it up.
  - Narcotic analgesics and other "painkillers" such as heroin, morphine and OxyContin numb the senses.
  - Hallucinogens like LSD alter the way that the brain processes information.
  
- **Some drugs can affect users in multiple ways.**
  - Ecstasy, for instance, is both a stimulant and a hallucinogen.

- **A substance abuser's personality and ability to function is directly affected by the drugs that they take.**
  - Cocaine or other stimulants can make people overconfident, hyperactive and even reckless, which significantly increases the risk of them having an accident on the job.
  - Alcohol, marijuana and other depressants create a dangerous "sedating effect" that can slow a person's reaction time and prevent them from thinking clearly.
  
- **Since people frequently feel "good" when they are under the influence of alcohol and drugs, they often don't recognize that they are actually dangerous to themselves and others.**
  
- **Additionally, the "residual" effect of a substance can cause a person to have an accident hours or even days after they last used it.**
  - What a substance abuser does on their "own time" can still affect them and their coworkers on the job.
  
- **When people think of substance abuse, they often picture an addict living on the street.**
  - The fact is that most abusers have jobs.
  - They are frequently able to conceal their problem from their employers, coworkers and even their families.
  
- **Alcohol is by far the most commonly abused of all drugs. In the United States alone:**
  - There are over 38 million binge drinkers.
  - Nearly half of all serious workplace accidents are caused by people drinking on the job.
  - Ten thousand people die each year in alcohol-related automobile accidents.
  
- **Impairment starts with the first drink, making it extremely dangerous to operate vehicles, power tools, machinery or heavy equipment.**

- **If a coworker who appears to be "under the influence" is attempting to drive or operate equipment, notify your supervisor.**
  - If you aren't on the job, call the police.
  - Be careful, because a person who is drunk may act irrationally, have emotional outbursts, even become violent.
- **After alcohol, the second-most frequently abused drug is marijuana.**
- **Once illegal throughout the country, marijuana has now been approved for medical and even recreational use in a number of states.**
  - But changes in the drug's legal status do not make it any safer.
- **Like alcohol, marijuana is a depressant that:**
  - Impairs short-term memory.
  - Reduces the ability to concentrate.
  - Affects coordination.
  - Slows reaction time.
- **All of these effects increase the risk of accidents and injuries on the job.**
- **Marijuana use also has a "cumulative" effect, that can cause long-term users to:**
  - Lose ambition.
  - Suffer from paranoia.
  - Develop negative personality traits that can hurt their chances for advancement.
- **People who smoke marijuana also often drink alcohol to increase their "high".**
  - But being "doubly impaired" increases their likelihood of being involved in an accident as well.

- **Combining drugs can also lead to an overdose.**
  - For instance, consuming alcohol along with strong depressants such as barbiturates and tranquilizers can be fatal.
- **The most commonly overlooked depressants in the workplace are fumes from paint, aerosol sprays, adhesives, gasoline and similar products.**
  - Breathing in these "inhalants" not only affects your brain, but can permanently damage your lungs and respiratory tract as well.
- **Drugs can be very "seductive".**
  - Even when the negative effects of a substance are well known, people can still be drawn to them.
- **Illegal stimulants, such as cocaine, crack (a concentrated form of cocaine) and methamphetamine, as well as drugs like narcotic analgesics such as heroin are all extremely addictive drugs, with terrible side-effects.**
- **"Crystal meth" (methamphetamine) is made from highly toxic materials, including anhydrous ammonia, red phosphorus and lithium.**
  - This mixture is so powerful and corrosive that people who regularly smoke it have had their teeth disintegrate.
- **Someone who uses crystal meth can have a tremendous amount of energy, which they can put into their work.**
  - But they also lose the ability to think rationally and act safely.
- **People who use narcotics like heroin experience persistent drowsiness and "fuzzy" thinking.**
  - On a job site, where everyone needs to be alert, a heroin user can put themselves and others at serious risk.
- **People who use illegal stimulants and narcotics are playing a dangerous game.**
  - Unless they clean up their act, they're likely to end up in jail, a mental institution or an early grave.

- **In recent years, it has also become popular to abuse prescription and over-the-counter medications.**
  - Many people wrongly assume that if something is a "medicine", it must be safe.
  - Medication abuse can be just as addictive and deadly as using illegal drugs.
  
- **Commonly abused prescription drugs include:**
  - Stimulants, such as amphetamines and Ritalin.
  - Narcotic analgesics, such as OxyContin and medications containing codeine.
  
- **Some people even use over-the-counter medicines, such as cough syrup containing dextromethorphan (DXM), to get "high".**
  
- **Substance abuse of any kind is dangerous. It can:**
  - Take away a person's job, savings, friends and family.
  - Land them in jail.
  - Destroy their health.
  - Cause severe mental problems
  - Even kill them.
  
- **Worst of all, what a substance abuser does while under the influence can endanger coworkers and anyone else that they come into contact with.**
  
- **When the risks are obvious, why do intelligent people allow themselves to "get hooked"?**
  - Few people set out to become substance abusers.
  - Most alcoholics start as casual drinkers.
  - Many hard drug users get hooked through experimentation.
  - People who are addicted to medications may even consider themselves "teetotalers," because they don't drink alcohol or use illegal drugs.
  
- **Stress, depression, anxiety and personal tragedy can all drive a person to use alcohol or drugs to help them "escape" from their problems.**
  - Chronic physical pain and mental illness can also lead a person to "self-medicate".

- **People are particularly vulnerable to becoming substance abusers when they go through traumatic events.**
  - Deaths in the family, broken relationships, getting laid-off and serious financial difficulties are just a few of the things that can start a person drinking or using drugs.
  
- **But alcohol or drugs never really provide a solution to our problems.**
  - In fact, they will only make the situation worse.
  
- **One thing that is common to many substance abusers is that their use "escalates" over time.**
  - A "heavy" abuser can eventually build up a tolerance to alcohol and most drugs, so that they need to use more of them to get the same effect.
  
- **While this "tolerance" may make the person feel that they're in control of their substance use, it's actually a warning sign that they're becoming dependent on their drugs or alcohol.**
  
- **"Psychological dependence" comes first.**
  - This is when someone can't help wanting a substance, so that it increasingly becomes the focus of their lives.
  
- **"Physical dependence" occurs when the person's body becomes "addicted" to the substance.**
  - At this point, if the user doesn't get their daily "fix" they'll begin to feel physical symptoms of drug "withdrawal".
  
- **Abusing any substance can lead to psychological dependence.**
  
- **Physical dependence usually results from using:**
  - Cocaine.
  - Heroin.
  - Prescription pain relievers.
  - Alcohol.



- **People who have developed a dependency often can't or won't see what is obvious to the people around them.**
  - This is called "denial".
- **If anyone expresses concern about your drug or alcohol use, listen to them.**
  - If you were really in control, they wouldn't be talking to you about it.
- **As you've probably guessed, substance abuse doesn't "play favorites".**
- **When the circumstances are "right", anyone, of any age, can become an abuser.**
  - To stop that from happening to us, we all need to monitor our behavior, and be honest with ourselves.
- **To prevent substance abuse from "sneaking up" on you:**
  - Never use illegal drugs.
  - Remember that just because a drug might be legal, that doesn't mean it's safe.
  - Only take prescription medicines that have been prescribed by a reputable doctor.
  - Follow the directions for all of the medications that you use.
  - If you drink, "monitor" yourself, and don't overdo it.
- **Addiction to alcohol and drugs is a disease, and as with many illnesses, a person's heredity can play a part.**
  - If there is a history of substance abuse in your family, you need to be especially careful.
- **There are no known cures for drug addiction or alcoholism.**
  - But with effort, and help from others, a person can stop their harmful behaviors.
  - A sip of beer or a hit off a joint is all it can take to send someone back to a vicious cycle of self-destructive behavior.

- **Keeping substance abuse off the job site should be a top priority for all companies.**
  - Many companies implement formal drug and alcohol policies.
- **Your company's policy can help to keep you and your coworkers safe by providing simple guidelines for all employees to follow.**
  - Workers are expected to be completely drug-free and sober when they report to their job.
  - They must remain that way throughout their shift.
- **They should also adhere to the company's drug and alcohol policy when they are:**
  - Attending company sponsored recreational events.
  - "On call", awaiting assignment.
  - Subcontracting for another construction company.
- **In addition to listing behaviors to avoid, your company's drug and alcohol policy will outline the steps that you should take if you are having a substance abuse problem.**
- **It will also contain information on what you should do if you suspect that a coworker may be under the influence of drugs or alcohol.**
  - Remember, keeping quiet about substance abuse in the workplace is dangerous!
  - Unless an abuser is reported, they'll never receive the help that they need, and will continue to be a threat to the health and safety of everyone at your company.
- **When substance abuse is brought to a supervisor's attention, their next step is to investigate the situation.**
  - Workers who are suspected of being "under the influence" will immediately be removed from any tasks that could endanger themselves or others.
  - They will then be interviewed by someone who is trained to handle substance abuse problems.

- **When confronted, some substance abusers immediately ask for help.**
  - If a suspected abuser denies that they are under the influence, a "reasonable suspicion" alcohol or drug test can be given.
- **A company can also perform periodic alcohol and drug tests to uncover substance abuse problems that might otherwise go unnoticed.**
  - Government regulations require random substance abuse tests for truck drivers and other transportation industry employees who have "safety-sensitive" jobs.
- **Failing a substance abuse test will not necessarily result in disciplinary action.**
  - However, the employee will be required to enter a drug or alcohol rehabilitation program.
- **OSHA does not allow a company to conduct drug tests on employees as a form of retaliation when the worker has complained about unsafe work conditions.**
- **When an employee has a substance abuse problem, the situation will typically be handled like any other serious illness.**
  - A leave of absence can often be arranged, or in some cases the employee can be assigned alternate work while they are rehabilitating.
- **Your company's objective is to get rid of substance abuse, not employees.**
  - In most cases only people who refuse treatment or have caused a serious accident will face suspension or termination.
- **Some companies have "Employee Assistance Programs" (EAPs) that offer resources to help workers combat substance abuse problems.**

- **You can also help a coworker overcome substance abuse by being understanding, and encouraging their rehabilitation efforts.**
  - People who are trying to recover from drug or alcohol abuse need as much support as they can get from family, friends and coworkers.
- **It's crucial for them to seek help from people who have been down the road of addiction themselves and have found another path to follow.**
  - Groups like Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous can provide significant assistance.

**\* \* \* SUMMARY \* \* \***

- **Never underestimate the danger of drugs and alcohol.**
- **Know your company's drug and alcohol policy and follow it.**
- **Inform your supervisor immediately if you suspect a coworker is "under the influence."**
- **If you drink, do it in moderation and don't drive.**
- **Use proper respiratory protection when working with "inhalants".**
- **Never use illegal drugs, and remember that even legal drugs, including marijuana, can be dangerous.**
- **Follow the directions for all of the medications that you take.**
- **By doing your part to ensure that you and your coworkers are drug-free and sober, you can help to create a more productive job site... that's safer for everyone!**