Is Substance Abuse a Problem in Your Workplace?

WHAT’S AT STAKE?

When someone has a substance abuse problem, it affects his or her family members and friends. And since most drug users, binge and heavy drinkers, and people with substance use disorders are employed, the problem is also a concern for employers and co-workers

WHAT’S THE DANGER?

Safe workers rely on their sharp senses, and accurate and quick reflexes. These are the very qualities affected by substance abuse. As well, people who abuse alcohol and/or other drugs often make poor decisions and have a distorted perception of their abilities. Falls, fires, traffic accidents and violent acts are common results of alcohol and drug abuse in the workplace.

Example

A 25-year-old fishing boat captain was sentenced to 40 months? imprisonment after being found guilty of negligent manslaughter, reckless endangerment and boating under the influence of a drug in connection with the death of one of his crew members.
The captain failed a toxicology test after his 58-foot fishing boat rolled three times in 25-foot (7.6-meter) waves off the Oregon coast in January 2007. One crew member died, while the captain and two others survived after being rescued by US Coast Guard personnel.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

There’s a tendency to consider substance abuse as a private matter, but in the workplace, it is definitely not. You have a

right and a responsibility to prevent drug and alcohol abuse at work.

The people we work with are often our friends, and sometimes our supervisors, so it’s hard to consider reporting their substance abuse. But keep in mind that their behavior could cause a fatal mistake? And you could be a victim. Here are some warning signs and symptoms of substance abuse to be aware of in a coworker, although they may not necessarily stem from an addiction:

- Weight loss
- Sweating
- Chills
- Slowed or slurred speech
- Impaired coordination
- Slow reaction time
- Irritability
- Excessive talking
- Inability to sit still
- Limited attention span
- Poor motivation and lack of energy
- Aggressive, unpredictable or violent behavior
- Money problems, including asking coworkers for loans
- Carelessness, frequent mistakes
- Risky behavior or lack of concern for others? safety

Very often when someone is suspected of drinking or doing drugs, nothing is said, due to our desire to avoid conflict or cause difficulty for someone we like.

But who picks up the slack for this person and runs the risk of injury or worse because he or she can’t function properly? The co-workers do.

FINAL WORD

You have a right to a safe workplace. You have a right to be free of the kinds of dangers caused by substance abuse at work. Any person working under the influence of drugs or alcohol should be reported immediately. It will probably be one of the hardest things you ever have to do. But it will be worth it in the long

run if it saves someone from injury or death.