

Are alcohol or drugs causing issues in your workplace?

Recently I was contacted by a member of the NZ Trucking Association who was concerned about one of his employees he believed was addicted to one of the supposedly 'Legal Highs'. Our member said that his employee was a good worker who wished to get his life in order and support his young family. Our member wanted to support him to resolve his addiction issues, so that he could continue to be a productive employee. Whilst researching this issue for our member I discovered a wealth of information on the subject which I am now sharing with you.

The trucking industry in New Zealand is no different to any other in New Zealand, in that it is susceptible to employees who may be under the influence of Alcohol or Drugs. The difference for the trucking industry is the risk factor for the rest of the community if things go wrong. Statistics show that almost 48 per cent of all those in full-time employment in New Zealand are 'Binge Drinkers', eight per cent of New Zealanders have used three or more illegal drugs in the last year, and about 15 per cent of New Zealanders are current cannabis users. Alcohol is the second biggest contributing factor for road crashes in New Zealand. In 2012, alcohol or drugs were contributing factors in 21 per cent of all reported serious injuries from road crashes and 12 per cent of all minor injuries from road crashes. Worse still 33 per cent of all road deaths had alcohol or drugs as a contributing factor. So the reality is that on the law of averages any business will have employees who are having issues with alcohol or drugs, it could be anyone from the storeman, to the truck drivers, to the managing director.

The misuse of alcohol and drugs can cause a range of issues in your workplace. These have the potential to impact on your business, your other employees, your customers and the wider community. Employees under the influence of

alcohol and drugs are at risk of not only injuring themselves, but are putting others at risk through their actions. Fellow employees face increased workload and stress levels as they cover for impaired colleagues. Employers have to deal with reduced productivity, poor decision making, health and safety issues, and strained customer relationships. The financial impact on your business can be substantial, with the potential for increased legal costs, insurance premiums, ACC levies, and the risk of theft and fraud to support addictions. The reputation and public image of your business can also be at risk.

Employers have a number of legal obligations under the Health and Safety in Employment legislation to ensure that they provide a safe workplace. Employers must take all practicable steps to ensure the safety of their employees in the workplace. The legislation requires all significant hazards to be eliminated, isolated and minimised in that order of priority. An employee who is under the influence of alcohol or drugs would be classed as a significant hazard. Both employers and employees have personal and legal responsibilities to manage alcohol and drug abuse in the workplace; this is best achieved by working together.

So how can you protect your business? Firstly you need to develop an effective alcohol and drug policy for your workplace. This should be done in consultation with your employees, and should include the following aspects:

- drinking and drug use at work
- workplace discipline
- recognition and help for those with alcohol and drug related problems
- alcohol and drug education
- training with supporting resources

If you refer to the Department of Labour website they have a sample Drug and Alcohol Policy which can be used to assist you to develop your

own policy. The Fleet Safety website www.fleetsafety.govt.nz is also a good source of supporting resources, including an employee training resource titled 'Driving under the influence of drugs and alcohol'.

A successful strategy for your workplace should include a broad based health programme, rather than a focus on alcohol and drug problems in isolation. A programme that looks at general health issues is more likely to attract ready participation from employees than one that solely focuses on alcohol and drug use. A broad based health programme will include information and advice on a range of issues including nutrition, exercise, dealing with stress and fatigue, cardiac care, alcohol and drug issues.

It is increasingly common for trucking businesses to include details of their workplace alcohol and drug policies in their employment agreements, including the procedures around random alcohol and drug testing, and the consequences of failing these tests. Best practice includes having a policy of mandatory pre-employment drug testing for prospective employees. There are a number of specialist alcohol and drug testing agencies that can provide this service. Workplace drug testing is legal for safety sensitive roles, and helps businesses comply with their obligations under the Health and Safety in Employment legislation, which requires employers to eliminate, isolate and minimise hazards. An alcohol or drug impaired employee is a workplace hazard. Before implementing changes to employment agreements or workplace alcohol and drug policies, you are advised to seek professional advice. □