

**Guidelines for
Managers/Supervisors on dealing
with substance misuse in the
workplace**

January 2004

INDEX

SECTION		PAGE
SECTION 1	SUBSTANCE MISUSE ISSUES – ALCOHOL	3
SECTION 2	SUBSTANCE MISUSE ISSUES – DRUG AND SOLVENT MISUSE	4
SECTION 3	MEDICAL EMERGENCIES	8
SECTION 4	INITIAL ASSESSMENT OF INCIDENTS	10
SECTION 5	DISPOSAL OF DISCARDED NEEDLES	11
SECTION 6	HANDLING OF SUBSTANCES	12

NOTE

Wherever the designation Manager is used throughout this policy, it is taken to mean Head of Service, Line Manager, Nominated Officer, Supervisor, Officer in Charge or anyone who has a responsibility for employees through their work.

The policy applies to all Council staff except those whose terms and conditions are governed by School Governing Bodies. Teaching staff are governed by a separate Leave of Absence policy. Non teaching school based employees are also covered by a separate Leave of Absence Policy. Catering and cleaning employees employed as part of the Catering & Cleaning Direct Service Organisation **are** covered by this policy.

NOTES OF GUIDANCE FOR MANAGERS ON DEALING WITH SUBSTANCE MISUSE ISSUES

SECTION 1 - SUBSTANCE MISUSE ISSUES - ALCOHOL

Problems with alcohol at work usually fall into one of two main categories:-

- the employee who drinks inappropriately on occasions
- the employee who consistently engages in inappropriate drinking.

Problems arising from the first category are likely to be straightforward cases of misconduct whereas drinkers in the second category are likely to have associated health, absence and long-term performance problems. However, even occasional drinking may be a response to an underlying problem, such as stress.

It is not easy for Managers to make a distinction between the two different types of inappropriate drinking. Some of the symptoms of excessive alcohol intake can be similar to the effects of a range of medical conditions including diabetes and epilepsy. Consequently when dealing with problems caused by suspected alcohol misuse, Managers should arrange an appropriate assessment and make a full investigation of all the circumstances before deciding on the appropriate action.

It is also advisable to intervene at an early stage to avoid the need for later disciplinary action.

When an employee's absences, deterioration in performance or even misconduct at work are due to consistent heavy drinking then it may be appropriate to treat the problem as one of illness. However, it is advisable to proceed with caution.

The following steps should help: -

- keep accurate, confidential records of instances of poor performance or other problems
- interview the employee in private. If the employee is actually under the influence of alcohol, wait until they are sober
- concentrate on the instances of poor performance that have been identified
- ask for the employee's reasons for poor performance and question whether it could be due to a 'health' problem, without specifically mentioning alcohol
- discuss possible work related causes such as excessive workload or too much responsibility
- if appropriate discuss the Council's Substance Misuse policy and the help available inside and outside the Council
- agree future action
- arrange regular meetings to monitor progress and discuss any further problems if they arise.

Counselling for alcohol problems is a very delicate process and Managers are advised to refer employees to a trained counsellor either at the Council's retained counselling service or at one of the agencies outlined in the Substance Misuse policy.

SECTION 2 – SUBSTANCE MISUSE ISSUES - DRUG AND SOLVENT MISUSE

Drug misuse is a growing problem involving the use of both illegal drugs and everyday substances such as lighter fuel, etc.

Dealing with drug misuse has many similarities to dealing with alcohol misuse but the fact that many drugs are illegal substances becomes an added problem for the Council. In addition the use of some drugs can more rapidly affect physical and mental health than alcohol abuse, consequently the earlier the problem can be dealt with the greater the chance of rehabilitation.

As detailed in the Substance Misuse policy, the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 makes it an offence to possess, supply, offer to supply or produce controlled drugs without authorisation. It is also an offence for the occupier of premises to permit knowingly the production or supply of any controlled drugs or allow the smoking of cannabis or opium on those premises. Under common law it is an offence to 'aid and abet' the commission of an offence under the Misuse of Drugs Act.

It should be borne in mind that in certain circumstances an employer who does nothing about a drugs problem may also be liable to charges under the Health and Safety At Work Act 1974. For example, requiring an employee with a history of drug misuse to perform a job which requires a steady hand if it is to be done safely.

Signs of drug misuse are not always obvious and may be confused with other conditions or problems. However, it is sensible to bear in mind the possibility of drug misuse when any of the following signs are noticed:-

ABSENTEEISM

- Frequent instances of unauthorised leave
- Excessive sick leave
- Poor time keeping - excessive lateness

HIGH ACCIDENT RATE

- Frequent accidents at work and elsewhere
- Careless handling and maintenance of equipment
- Lack of safety sense - threat to other employees

POOR PERFORMANCE

- Lack of concentration
- Reduced productivity

- Work requires greater effort
- Mistakes and errors of judgement
- Increasing difficulty in handling complex assignments
- Excuses for poor work performance.

SPASMODIC WORK PATTERNS

- Alternating periods of high and low productivity
- Increasing unreliability
- Unnecessary absences from post.

CHANGES IN PERSONALITY

- Over-reaction to real or imagined criticism
- Reluctance to accept responsibility
- Moodiness, irritability, lethargy.

OTHER SYMPTOMS

- Facial flushing and bleary eyes.

It is best to concentrate on any performance problems and proceed with caution. The following steps should help:-

- keep accurate, confidential records of instances of poor performances or other problems
- interview the employee in private. If the employee is actually under the influence of an illicit substance, wait until they are coherent
- concentrate on the instances of poor performance that have been identified
- ask for the employee's reasons for poor performance and question whether it could be due to a 'health' problem, without specifically mentioning drugs or solvents. Please keep notes of any discussions that you have with the employee. A copy may be provided to the employee if requested
- discuss possible work related causes such as excessive workload or too much responsibility
- if appropriate discuss the Council's Substance Misuse policy and the help available inside and outside the Council
- agree future action

- arrange regular meetings to monitor progress and discuss any further problems if they arise.

If it is identified that an employee is a drug user, it is sometimes useful to know what type of drug user they are as this can help govern how they may be dealt with.

The different types of drug user fall into the following categories:-

Experimental

- random choice of drug, often a group activity - short lived phase.

Recreational

- regular, controlled use
- specific choice of drug
- specific situations of use
- expectation of enjoying it
- the drug taking is not seen as a problem by the user.

Dependent

- uncontrolled use
- drug use becomes increasingly central to life
- psychological and/or physical dependence present
- exclusion of other activities
- drugs used to cope with or mask problems
- isolated activity
- less specific choice of drugs.

Each type of user needs to be handled differently. You will need to find out which type of user you are dealing with and to do this you will need to assess their drug use. This can be done through a series questions which may include the following:-

- why do you use drugs?
- how often do you use drugs?
- which drugs do you use?
- when do you use drugs?
- how much do you spend on drugs?

- how long have you used drugs for?
- do you use drugs on your own or with others?
- how do you feel when you take drugs? And afterwards?
- how do you administer the drugs?
- do you see your drug use as a problem?
- how much of the drug do you take?
- where do you take the drug? (Health and Safety issues)
- how do you obtain the drug?
- what role does the drug play in your life?
- are there any pressures that are contributing to your drug use?

Counselling for drug and solvent related problems is a very delicate process and Managers are advised to refer employees to a trained counsellor either at the Council's retained counselling service or at one of the agencies outlined in the Substance Misuse policy.

If an employee is under the influence of alcohol or a chemical substance, the Manager should ask them to leave the premises but in doing so be mindful of how the employee is going to get home. The course of action will vary according to the circumstances of the case but may involve sending the employee home by taxi, the employee being accompanied by another employee or sending for a family member or friend to come and pick the person up. When deciding which course of action to follow, the Manager should undertake a risk assessment. In undertaking this risk assessment, they must ensure that no other employee is put at risk as a result of the action taken.

SECTION 3 - MEDICAL EMERGENCIES

First Aid Contact

If someone has lost consciousness or goes into a coma after using substances, first aid must take precedence over any other actions that the Manager may have to decide upon. Wherever possible, this should be undertaken by a qualified first aider.

Acute intoxication, unconsciousness and semi-consciousness should all be regarded as medical emergencies.

IF IN DOUBT ALWAYS TREAT AS A MEDICAL EMERGENCY. CALL A FIRST AIDER.

Take the following action: -

Do not panic. Do not move the employee unnecessarily. If someone is present get them to ring for an ambulance. Do not leave the employee alone. Check their airway is clear and then their breathing. If they are not breathing resuscitation will be necessary. Check pulse.

Wherever possible, whilst waiting for the ambulance, a qualified first aider must attend the employee and render any necessary care.

Place the casualty in the recovery position. This should prevent the employee choking on their own vomit and stop their tongue falling down their throat.

Help the employee's breathing by loosening the collar and any tight clothing. Remove any loose fitting false teeth. Do not give anything to eat or drink.

Telephone for an ambulance to attend the casualty, if this has not already been done.

Managers should ensure that an ambulance has been called and the following details have been provided to the ambulance controller: -

- confirm telephone number;
- address/location of office where employee is;
- what is the nature of the emergency (suspected substance misuse);
- is the patient unconscious or conscious and is he/she responsive;
- do you know what substance(s) are suspected to have been taken;
- how many persons, if more than 1, are involved;
- do you know the patient's name and age.

Don't automatically assume that substances are the problem. Try to find out if the employee is diabetic, epileptic or has any other medical condition. Also check for physical injuries.

Collect any evidence of what has been taken e.g. tablets, bottles, prescriptions, syringes, etc. This may help the hospital identify the substance(s) involved. If needles are involved

take great care to avoid needle stick injuries. See page 12 for advice on the safe disposal of needles.

Keep any vomited material. In cases where you don't know what has been taken it might help the ambulance or medical staff to see it. However, do not try to induce vomiting.

If the employee comes round, provide reassurance. Waking up on the floor with a group of people around you can be a frightening experience. Ask any onlookers to step back. Try to create a calm and supportive atmosphere. **Employees should be aware that it is possible that employees who are under the influence of a substance may act out of character, e.g. employees may become aggressive, and they should be aware of this.**

Wait for the ambulance to arrive. Arrange for a member of staff to go with the employee to hospital.

As soon as the emergency has been dealt with, the employee's next of kin should be notified and an Accident/Incident Form completed.

It is important to ascertain specific information relating to the emergency, for example what substance has been taken. In an emergency staff should be sensitive, calm and non-threatening towards the affected employee. The only priority in responding to such an incident is the safety and well being of the employee.

Under no circumstances should any attempt be made to formally interview any employee who is under the influence of an intoxicating substance.

SECTION 4 - INITIAL ASSESSMENT OF INCIDENTS

Questions to consider when responding to a substance related emergency or recording a substance related incident.

HOW?

- What is the condition/behaviour of the employee?
- How did you hear about it, or find out about it, and how reliable is the source of the information?
- What evidence is there to substantiate the information?
- Disclosure?
- Suspicion/rumour?

WHO?

- Is it an employee?
- Or is it a client or member of the public?

WHERE AND WHEN?

- Was it on Council premises?
- Was it off Council premises?
- Was it during working hours?

WHAT?

- Is the substance identifiable?
- Is it legal/illegal?
- Is it harmful?
- Is it their own/others?
- What method was used?
- What quantity was taken?
- Is the substance still present - on Council premises/employee?

SECTION 5 - DISPOSAL OF DISCARDED NEEDLES

Physically picking up the needle can be done via a Sharps kit which can be obtained from Procurement Services. This kit comprises of disinfectant spray, sterile tongs, protective gloves, a small self sealing sharps box (which is used only once) and a clinical waste disposal sack. The use of this kit presents little risk to the user. Health and Safety Coordinators have been trained in the use of sharps boxes to make the situation safe as quickly as possible.

Sharps boxes or other containers can be taken by arrangement to the Cleansing Section at Penmaen. This can be arranged by contacting them on 01495 2357025. Discarded needles should be reported via the Customer Care Section on 01495 235336 who will arrange for them to be collected by Cleansing Services employees.

SECTION 6 - HANDLING OF SUBSTANCES

Health And Safety - Safe Practices

There are specific activities because of the inherent risks involved where employees must not misuse substances. Some examples of these activities include:

- where an employee is expected to drive any motor vehicle on Council business;
- operating power machinery or other tools/devices where there could be a risk to safety such as in the use of grass cutting equipment, chain saws, woodworking machinery, etc;
- working at height;
- working on or near the highway;
- where the activity could affect the Council's image dealing with the general public or other persons not in the Council's employment;
- where disruption to the efficient working of the Service Area may result;
- working with vulnerable people.

This list is not exhaustive or exclusive and employees should be made aware of any specific activities, connected to their work where an employee must not misuse substances.

Health and Safety - Precautions

Care should be taken when handling any substance suspected of being a drug. If possible disposable gloves should be worn. These should be kept in the first aid kit held by qualified first aiders. If these are not available, care should be taken to wash hands immediately after handling.

Needles and syringes which may be found on Council premises should be handled with great care to avoid needle-stick injuries. All premises should have a sharps disposal box kept on the premises. Managers should ensure that the location of the Sharps box is widely known amongst their employees.

In the event of a needle-stick injury, medical attention should be sought immediately.

- obtain and wear, disposable gloves before taking any action;
- encourage bleeding;
- wash the puncture/laceration under running tap water;
- obtain medical advice from the nearest Accident & Emergency Department or a General Practitioner;
- remove gloves (prior to removing, wash with gloves on in soap and water first, remove carefully to avoid puncture and discard in a plastic bag).

Confiscation

If an employee has to be taken to hospital, the remains of any substance in tablet form that they may have used should be sent with the accompanying member of staff or ambulance personnel.

Where an officer confiscates a substance which is believed to be a drug, the record of the confiscation must be countersigned by both the Head of Service and the Senior Member of staff from Internal Audit who was present when the discovery was made. The record and the suspected illegal substance must then be taken to the Police. If you confiscate any substances from employees on Council property which are thought to be drugs, take them to the Police immediately and do not store them in drawers, etc as this will mean that you will become 'in possession' of the substance and could be liable to prosecution. Handing the substances over to the Police will also protect the Council from prosecution under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. A search record form is included in the policy.

Suspicion/Rumour

It is important that the greatest care is taken in any attempt to substantiate a rumour. False accusations can lead to repercussions or a breakdown of communication and trust. It is also vital not to promote further rumours. Discretion and sensitivity are paramount. Managers will need to determine how much information is to be conveyed to other employees.

There is a need to be sure of the source of the rumour and the reliability of the information.

Confidentiality

Managers will need to consider carefully their response to employees who approach them for advice on substance misuse. All information received must be treated with the utmost confidence.

Advice on specialist agencies that accept referrals for substance misuse is contained within the policy or is available from the counselling service retained by the Council on 0800 7835273.

Where an employee comes to a Manager seeking help, they will be dealt with, in the first instance, under the Council's Managing Attendance Procedure. The steps to be followed are detailed in the Substance Misuse policy.

JANUARY 2004