

Work environment – **General information**

15.01.04

Developing an alcohol policy and getting help >

This information bulletin outlines the basic considerations of developing a workplace alcohol policy and provides contact telephone numbers for agencies that can assist workplaces in dealing with alcohol problems.

Legislation

The [Workplace Health and Safety Act](#) outlines the responsibilities of employers to provide a safe work place for both workers and other people (section 55). The Act also outlines the responsibilities of workers to take appropriate care of both their own health and safety and that of other people (section 59).

The problem of alcohol at work

Alcohol is a depressant drug. Depressant drugs slow down the transmission of messages travelling via the nervous system to and from the brain. The result of this can include poor physical coordination, impaired judgement and decreased alertness – all of which may lead to workplace injuries.

The average person's liver takes an hour to remove the alcohol from one standard drink from their blood. If the person has drunk a large quantity of alcohol, had a short sleep and then gone to work, they may still have a significant level of alcohol in their body. They may be at risk of a workplace injury.

A hangover results from the body being both poisoned by the alcohol, and withdrawing from it. A person suffering from a hangover will work slower and concentrate less on their tasks.

Alcohol use can also lead to unacceptable behaviour such as aggression towards co-workers and customers, over confidence, poor decision making, reduced productivity, absenteeism and staff turnover.

Developing a workplace alcohol policy

One important way a workplace can show its commitment to reducing the problems caused by alcohol is to develop and promote an alcohol policy. Such a policy can also be used to address the use of other drugs.

The key to successfully addressing alcohol issues at work is consultation. It is essential that employers and workers consider each others ideas on this matter when developing the policy.

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Each workplace should develop a policy which reflects their needs.

The policy should:

- be part of a comprehensive health and safety program;
- be supported by the education of workers about alcohol issues;
- result from adequate consultation with all workers;
- contain a clear statement of the behaviour that is expected of workers (with regards to alcohol);
- apply equally to all workers, including managers and supervisors, at the workplace;
- address issues in the work environment which may increase the use of alcohol;
- provide for the appropriate treatment and rehabilitation for workers with problems;
- to the greatest degree possible, be non-punitive;
- be made known to all workers; and
- be evaluated after implementation and amended, if necessary, in line with the outcome of the evaluation.

The following information should be considered for inclusion into a workplace alcohol policy:

- 1) It is vital that management demonstrate support for the policy by insisting on its observance by all staff.
- 2) Changes may need to be made to the work environment to support the policy. For example, facilities supporting recreational pursuits such as sport, playing cards or reading could be provided. In addition, cheap attractive food in the work canteen may encourage workers to stay at the workplace during lunchtime, rather than eating at places where alcohol is sold. Alternatively, businesses employing only a small number of staff may be to arrange for a mobile van which sells foods to visit the workplace at lunchtime. Some workplaces supply subsidised alcohol to staff at the canteen/mess. This could be stopped as its gives employees the idea that alcohol consumption at work or during social functions is encouraged.
- 3) The provision of treatment and/or referral services is an important part of an alcohol policy. If problems are detected early, before serious physical and social effects occur, a brief intervention may be all that is needed. A list of some of the Northern Territory agencies that can be contacted for help is listed below.
- 4) Confidentiality for the worker undergoing treatment and rehabilitation must be guaranteed.
- 5) Workers should not be disadvantaged in terms of promotion because they have sought, or are accepting help from a program.

Additional assistance

Darwin

Employee Assistance Service	8941 1752
Alcohol and Other Drugs Program	8999 2691
Alcohol and Other Drug Services: Territory Health Services	8922 8399
Council for Aboriginal Alcohol Program Services	8984 4226

Katherine

Alcohol and Other Drugs Program

8973 8402

Tennant Creek

BRADAAG

8962 1912

Alice Springs

ADSCA

8951 7580

Drug and Alcohol Services Association

8952 8412

Nhulunbuy

Nhulunbuy Drugs and Alcohol Program

8987 0445

NT WorkSafe >**GPO Box 1722****Darwin NT 0801****Telephone:** 1800 019 115**Facsimile:** (08) 8999 5141**Email:** ntworksafe@nt.gov.au**Website:** worksafe.nt.gov.au