

Workplace instruction –
General



Alcohol at the workplace

Guidance for safety briefings

Alcohol at the workplace

Facts

The consumption of alcohol leads to an increased risk of accidents; about 25 percent of all accidents at work are due to the influence of alcohol. Studies on alcohol con-

sumption show that every fourth adolescent and every third young adult regularly drinks alcohol, this indicates that there is a high risk of them developing an addiction.



Due to the reaction of superiors, 90 per cent of all therapy-willing alcohol abusers found their way to a counselling center.

Consequences of alcohol and drug abuse at work

Important to know

- 5% of employees in the workplace are alcohol dependent, and a further 10% are at serious risk from becoming alcoholics.
- A standard alcoholic beverage contains approximately 10g of pure alcohol i.e. a small pint of beer (0.25l) or a glass of wine (0.1l). It is recommended that adults should not exceed 24g (men) and 12g (women) of pure alcohol in a day. This does not mean alcohol can be enjoyed everyday, instead a minimum of 2 days in the week should be kept alcohol free.
- Both employers and superiors are responsible for the safety of employees and for preventing dangers caused by the influence of alcohol intake. It is the duty of superiors to judge whether the employee(s) is at risk to themselves or others as a result of alcohol consumption.

Increased risks of accidents

- Caution residual alcohol: alcohol in the body is broken down very slowly (approx. 0.1 per mill per hour), this means that the drinks enjoyed in the evening can still affect the employee(s) next day at their workplace.

- There is an increased risk of accidents, especially when operating machines or driving, or any other activities requiring the employee to be alert.

Accidents at work are insured by the statutory accident insurance. This insurance cover is cancelled if alcohol, in legal terms, is considered the only cause of the accident. This includes accidents at work, on business trips or to and fro work. The superiors are obliged by duty of care, they are not allowed to simply look the other way. If there is a suspicion of alcohol, the supervisor must immediately stop the employee(s) from working and e.g. have them driven home by car.

Alcohol addiction

Habitual drinking (risky drinking) can lead to psychological or physical dependence. Alcohol dependency is diagnosed if at least three criteria, from the World Health Organization (WHO) classification system for the dependency syndrome, have been met during the last year:



- Strong desire or compulsion to consume alcohol
- Reduced ability to control when to start drinking or when to stop and how much to drink
- Physical withdrawal symptoms when alcohol is reduced
- Drinking with the aim of relieving withdrawal symptoms
- Developing alcohol tolerance, i.e. drinking larger quantities of alcohol to have the desired effect
- Tendency to disregard the socially accepted rules of drinking behaviour whilst consuming alcohol

- Neglecting other interests in favour of drinking
- Continued consumption of alcohol despite harmful physical, social and psychological consequences

Signs of problematic alcohol consumption can be changes in: external appearance (“alcohol plume” or “breath cleaner” (candies), absent gaze, glassy eyes), work behaviour (unreliability, performance fluctuations), social behaviour (irritability, aggressive behaviour, severe mood swings, social withdrawal).



Individuals who want to help people with alcohol abuse problems through explanations or excuses, unknowingly allies with the individual with alcohol problems and becomes a co-dependant person.

Everybody can help

Duty of care and responsibility

- Observe company regulations on alcohol (e.g. alcohol ban)
- Knowing company regulations concerning drugs (does an addiction prevention policy exist in the company?)
- Do not look away if a person is under the influence of alcohol, rather address the person tactfully or if necessary inform the superior
- Note that residual alcohol concentration and drug intake is hazardous
- Point out help (www.bzga.de/service/Beratungsstellen)
- If addiction-related problems occur, consult advice of occupational physician and social service. They can support while ensuring the secrecy obligation.

Never encourage victims of dependency or persons in danger of becoming addicts to drug consumption

Persons working with persons who remain abstinent, e.g. persons with alcohol use disorder, individuals with former alcohol problems, never tempt or mislead them to substance abuse, since for a person with alcohol problem one glass of alcohol can lead to alcoholic relapse.



Affects of alcohol consumption

Even in small quantities alcohol leads to noticeable impairment of performance. If medication and alcohol are taken at the same time, the effects of each can be unpredictable.

Below are some examples of the effects of alcohol on performance, signs of impairment and the resulting increase in the risk of accidents.



Depending on the individual's physical constitution and condition on the day, certain impairments of performance can already be reversed at a lower blood alcohol level.

Per mill	Affects
0.2 ‰	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• ability to give and receive criticism and ability to concentrate decreases• Risk taking rises• Responding time for eye and ear is extended
0.3 ‰	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Objects appear more distant than they really are
0.5 ‰	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Misjudging speed and distance• Visual performance is reduced significantly• Adaption from light to dark declines• Red light weakness increases• Hearing and ability to concentrate are reduced
0.7 ‰	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Disturbance of balance occurs• Reduction of night vision ability• Responding time is considerably slower
0.8 ‰	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Loss of control of eye movements• Visual field loss• Increased reaction time by approx. 35%• Considerable reduced ability to concentrate• Impairment of balance and coordination• Overestimation of your own abilities
0.9 ‰ and beyond	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Great impairment of concentration, attention, visual ability, slower responding time and hearing impairment• Speech disorder• Irregular gait, impaired balance• Extreme overestimation of one's abilities• Confusion, orientation disorders

Consider break down of alcohol!

Those who go to bed around midnight with 2.0 per mille will only sober up completely the next evening (depending on age, sex and physical constitution, etc.)



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Gustav-Heinemann-Ufer 130
50968 Cologne, Germany
Telephone +49 (0)221/3778-0
Fax +49 (0)221/3778-1199



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