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General



Alcohol in the workplace

Training
Support Material for Workplace Safety Briefings

Your Statutory Accident Insurance



Alcohol in the workplace: responsibility and safety

Alcohol can cause numerous physical and mental health conditions. In the workplace, high alcohol consumption among employees leads to more frequent absences, reduced productivity and a significantly increased risk of accidents.

Key facts about alcohol

- There is no such thing as risk-free consumption: even drinking small amounts is no longer considered safe
- Alcohol should not be consumed every day; it is recommended to have at least two alcohol-free days per week.
- Supervisors are required to prevent hazards posed by individuals under the influence of alcohol and to independently assess the risk situation.

The risk of accidents is particularly high here

- The body breaks down only about 0.1 per mille per hour. Drinking alcohol the night before often leads to impaired functioning the next day.
- In general, employees are covered by insurance in the event of workplace accidents. However, this coverage does not apply if alcohol consumption is the primary cause of the accident – whether at the workplace, during business trips or while commuting to work.
- If there is any suspicion, supervisors must immediately stop the employee from working and ensure that the employee can return home safely.

Alcohol dependence

Hazardous alcohol consumption can lead to psychological or physical dependence. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), alcohol dependence is present if at least 3 of these 6 criteria have been met during the past 12 months:

- A strong desire or compulsion to drink alcohol
- Reduced ability to control when to start, stop and how much to consume
- Physical withdrawal symptoms and/or alcohol consumption to alleviate withdrawal symptoms
- Increasingly large amounts of alcohol required to achieve the same effect (development of tolerance)
- Neglecting other interests in favour of alcohol consumption
- Continued alcohol consumption despite harmful physical, social and psychological consequences

Signs of problematic alcohol use include, among other things, the smell of alcohol on one's breath, a vacant stare or glassy eyes. In addition, unreliability, fluctuations in performance and changes in social behaviour – such as increased irritability, aggressive behaviour, mood swings or social withdrawal – may occur.

What are the effects of alcohol consumption?

Even the smallest amounts of alcohol can impair safety. Drug interactions are unpredictable and can drastically increase the risk of accidents.

Per mille	Impact
0.2	• The ability to think critically and concentrate declines • Risk appetite increases • Reaction times for visual and auditory perceptions are prolonged
0.3	• Objects appear further away than they actually are
0.5	• Misjudgment of speed and distance • Significantly reduced visual acuity • Light-dark adjustment diminishes • Ability to perceive red lights decreases • Impaired hearing and reduced ability to concentrate
0.7	• Balance problems occur • Night vision deteriorates • Response time becomes significantly longer
0.8	• Loss of control over eye movement • Restricted field of vision (“tunnel vision”) • An increase in reaction times of approximately 35% • Significant reduction in concentration • Balance problems, impaired movement patterns • Overconfidence
0.9 and above	• Significant impairments in concentration, attention, vision, reaction time and hearing • Impaired speech • Unsteady gait, balance problems • Excessive overconfidence • Confusion, disorientation



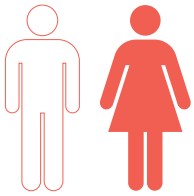
A fateful journey: even residual alcohol in the morning impairs perception and reaction time.

The effects of alcohol can vary depending on your physical condition and how you’re feeling that day!

One glass, two effects: the biological difference



Same amount, earlier risk: because women have less water in their bodies, their blood alcohol concentration rises about 20% faster and reaches the critical level sooner.



Long-term impairment: on average, women metabolise alcohol about 15% more slowly because they have fewer enzymes that break down alcohol.

Anyone can help

- Be familiar with company policies regarding alcohol, such as:
  - Is there a total ban on alcohol?
  - Is there a company-wide addiction management programme or a company policy in place?
  - Are there addiction counsellors?
- Employers and supervisors have a duty of care. This also includes helping employees confront the problem. A "summary dismissal" – which many people fear – is generally not legally permissible (unless the person in question commits a criminal offence).
- Don't look the other way when others are intoxicated; instead, tactfully speak to the person or, if necessary, their supervisor. Covering it up would be a misguided display of collegiality and could cause significant harm to those involved and others.

Organisations that can offer help

- Within the company:
  - Company physician, works council or employee representative, substance abuse counsellor – these positions are subject to a duty of confidentiality
- Outside the company:
  - Family physician (studies show that interventions by family physicians are highly effective)
  - Outpatient counselling and treatment centres; information on these is available, for example, from your health insurance provider
  - Self-help groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous or the Blue Cross

Never encourage consumption

Under no circumstances should colleagues who do not drink be encouraged or pressured to resume drinking.

FURTHER INFORMATION

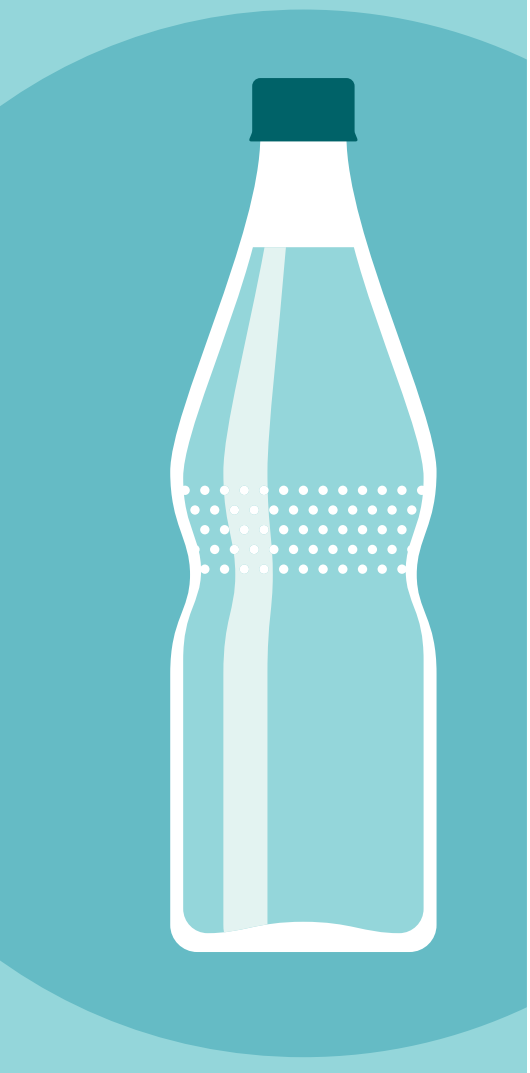
DGUV information 206-054: Dealing with alcohol abuse and dependence in the workplace
↗ **medien.bgetem.de**
Webcode: M23587713

DGUV information 206-009: Addiction prevention in the workplace – recommendations for action
↗ **medien.bgetem.de**
Webcode: M20575266

Additional information is available, for example, at
↗ **www.bzga.de/service** ↗ **www.dhs.de/infomaterial**



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