

Ensuring Fitness for Work – it's not just Good Management, it's the Law!

If you haven't already put in place a Fitness for Work Policy and a procedure for randomly testing employees for alcohol or drugs, you may be risking your business.

The evidence is clear that alcohol or drug impaired or fatigued employees are the cause of a significant amount of damage, lost production and serious accidents. Add to this the prospect of criminal and civil proceedings against both employers and employees and you have a potent cocktail for disaster.

Organisations in safety sensitive industries like security, in every state and territory, must ensure that their employees are in a fit condition to carry out their duties.

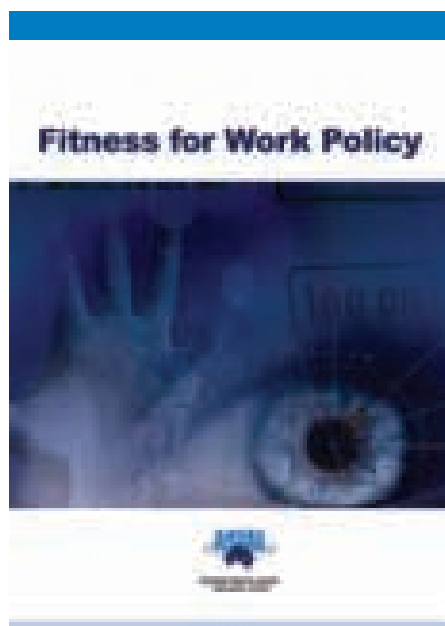
Regulatory agencies increasingly require organisations to actively exercise their duty of care by anticipating and addressing potential hazards. Most jurisdictions across Australia now have formal legislation or regulatory guidelines in these areas.

What is "Fitness for Work"?

To be "fit for work", an employee must be in a state (physical, mental and emotional) which enables them to perform assigned tasks competently and in a manner which does not threaten the safety or health of themselves or others. The capacity to perform safely can be impaired by alcohol and other drugs, fatigue, stress and a range of physical and medical conditions.

What are the effects of Alcohol and Other Drugs?

Both legal and illegal drugs can be broadly categorised as depressants, stimulants or hallucinogens. Most drugs, even in very low doses, can affect the capacity of an employee to



carry out their duties safely.

Alcohol is the most commonly used depressant drug. It affects both mental and motor function. The effects vary depending on individual tolerance and in general, women have a lower tolerance.

The effects of alcohol on performance include:

- Some people become aggressive
- Loss of inhibition;
- Impairment of coordination, judgment and ability to act quickly;
- Blurred vision;
- Slurred speech;
- Hangover – headache, shakiness, nausea and vomiting;
- In the longer term, damage to the brain, liver, heart and stomach.

Some prescription and 'over the counter' medications may cause impairment. Employees should outline the duties of their job to their doctor

and seek advice as to whether they will be impaired or affected by the medication they are taking.

Employees taking medication that may cause impairment should advise their supervisor. The supervisor conducts an impairment assessment.

Cannabis

May be classified as a depressant with hallucinogenic properties. Cannabis use can impair motor coordination, short-term memory, tracking ability, sensory functions and perception. Because it is stored in body fats cannabis can remain in the body for several weeks.

Opiate Analgesics

The use of these drugs may impair the ability to drive and operate machinery, cause nausea and vomiting. Long-term effects include tolerance, dependence and withdrawal symptoms. These include: Opium (illegal), Morphine, Codeine, Heroin (illegal), Pethidine and Methadone.

Whenever a manager or supervisor observes, or is advised of, a health or safety risk as a result of possible intoxication, they should either conduct the assessment personally or contact the designated supervisor/manager, to carry out an independent assessment if available.

If the employee fails the impairment assessment, the employee must not commence duty until they are assessed as being fit to commence work.

Educating Employees and Managers

Information on the Fitness for Work Policy should be included in letters of appointment, workplace agreements and in induction.

All employees should be offered

access to education e.g. on line tutorials, on the effects of alcohol and drugs in the workplace and the employers Fitness for Work Policy.

How do you Assess Impairment?

The misuse of alcohol or other drugs may result in an observable decline in work performance. Managers should be aware of the common indicators

Australian Standards. You may also choose to have a random testing program as part of your policy to meet your duties responsibilities relating to fitness for work.

General indicators include but are not limited to:

- Aggressive outbursts;
- strong smell of alcohol on the breath
- slurred or incoherent speech

- difficulty in concentrating on a task or a conversation

poor balance and coordination
The final decision lies with the employer, however, by introducing a Fitness for Work Policy and associated education program the responsible employer will protect their employees, the public and ultimately their business against the multitude of problems that can arise by doing nothing.

Through ASIAL, security providers have access to a tailored Fitness for Work Policy template and online tutorial for both employees and managers. We strongly recommend that if you have not already initiated a policy and education program, that you do so now.

For more information visit www.asial.com.au or email memberservices@asial.com.au

Note: The information provided above is for convenient reference only. ASIAL and Chris Delaney & Associates Pty Ltd provide this information on the basis that it is not to be relied upon in any or all cases, as the circumstances in each matter are specific. Accordingly, we provide this information for general reference only, but we advise you to take no action without prior reference to an Employee Relations professional. ASIAL members can contact Chris Delaney by emailing ir@asial.com.au

Employees should outline the duties of their job to their doctor and seek advice as to whether they will be impaired or affected by the medication they are taking.

that suggest that an alcohol or other drug problem may exist.

Where general observation indicates a possible issue you may choose to use a suitable screening product to test for the presence of drugs or alcohol. There are commercially available saliva, urine or breathalyzer test kits that meet

- unsteadiness on their feet
- red, bloodshot or watery eyes
- aggressive or argumentative
- overexcited or agitated
- simple instructions may not be followed
- drowsiness or asleep on the job or on work breaks



LaneWorkSafe
Worksafe – Workwell

LaneWorkSafe are proud to be associated with ASIAL in assisting members meet their requirements regarding Alcohol and Drug associated workplace safety.

Consultants to industry regarding the safety of all workplaces through Education and Products including On Site Saliva and Urine Drug Screening devices at wholesale prices. Self screening kits also available.



LaneWorkSafe are the sole distributor of Split Specimen Cup, used in workplaces Australia wide.



Oraltest Saliva quick and reliable. Screening for THC parent substance not metabolite. Indicative of recent use.

E-mail or telephone LaneWorkSafe for confidential advice and quotations.

Freecall 1800 429 219.

e-mail: stephen@laneworksafe.com.au

www.laneworksafe.com.au