



Protect Your Facility from the Effects of Substance Use

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With more legal access to controlled substances, it's harder than ever for employers to know what their responsibilities are for recognizing the signs of impairment and knowing how to intervene in a situation where reasonable suspicion is present. This leaves your customers and other employees at risk as well as your facility.

According to the annual [Quest Diagnostics Drug Testing Index](#), 5.1% of the general workforce tested positive for drugs. The data they collected shows that the highest drug testing positivity rates were in:

- Retail Trade (5.3%),
- Health Care and Social Assistance (4.7%)
- Real Estate Rental and Leasing (4.6%)

The lowest positivity rates were found in the industries of Utilities (2.8%) and Finance and Insurance (2.6%).

What Are an Employers' Supervisory Responsibilities?

Organizations need to train their supervisors to recognize the signs of impairment. In many states, the smell of marijuana or alcohol on the person or their clothing isn't enough to deem that the employee is impaired. Some common symptoms of impairment include:

- Excessive clumsiness
- Fast onset of fatigue
- Slurred speech
- Sweating
- Watery eyes
- Frequent runny nose
- Constricted or dilated pupils
- Shakiness/tremors
- Unsteady gait

While the above-listed symptoms can indicate impairment due to substance use, they can also be symptoms of other legitimate illnesses.

This means that supervisors need to get to **KNOW** their employees. A supervisor who regularly interacts with their team is bound to have conversations about how tough this allergy season is, or how a worker's new blood pressure medication is making them feel shaky. Employees who don't regularly have familiar conversations with their supervisors aren't going to voluntarily share those types of personal details. Supervisors who invest the time in knowing their team are much better equipped to determine when an employee may be acting abnormally due to substance use.

When Suspicion is Reasonable . . .

There are risks to people, place, product and reputation when an employee is impaired while they're on the clock. When a supervisor feels that their suspicion of impairment is reasonable they must intervene. Some best practices for these difficult confrontations include:

- Asking a Human Resources representative or fellow supervisor to determine if they observe the same symptoms
- Asking the second observer to be present during your conversation with the worker
- Inviting the worker to speak with you away from other employees and the common workspace
- Explaining the symptoms you've witnessed to the worker rather than accusing him or her of impairment
- Allowing the employee to explain their condition
- Document the entire intervention – from initial observations through conclusion

After this (hopefully) peaceful confrontation, the supervisor(s) are responsible for the continued safety of that employee and others in the workspace. Whether the symptomatic employee admits to being under the influence or not, you may need to send them home for the remainder of their shift to ensure safety in the workplace.

Facilities with clear drug use policies are better equipped to handle these situations of assumed impairment. While medically prescribed substances do allow workers some employment protections, companies may have written policies about working under the influence of those substances -as long as those policies are aligned with the local laws. By outlining your facility's stance on working under the influence, you reduce your liability in the instances where an employee needs to be dismissed because of their drug use.