

DRUG-FREE WORKPLACE



**SUBSTANCE ABUSE
POLICIES
ARE IN EFFECT**



SUBSTANCE ABUSE TESTING

Substance abuse and workplace policies

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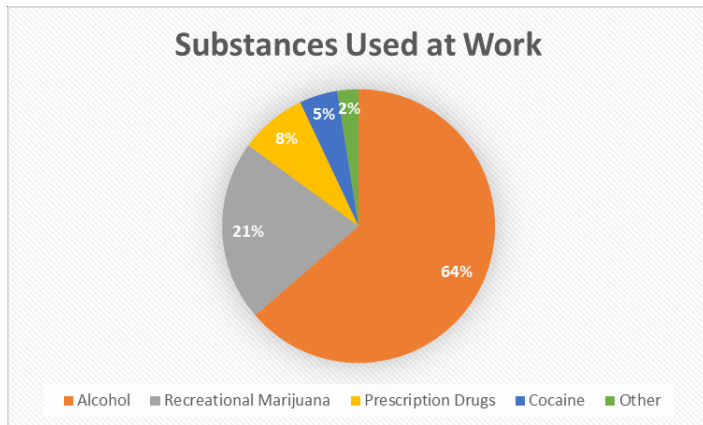
"Addiction begins with the thought that something physical can instantly fill up our emptiness inside." -
GraniteRecoveryCenters.com

Whether it is dealing with the fears, anxiety or uncertainty surrounding Covid-19, precarious circumstances within the global and national economies, prevailing issues surrounding race relations and justice sparked by the killing of George Floyd in the US, aging, loss of loved ones, etc., life bears no shortage of stressors. These unprecedented socio-economic challenges increase the requirement for all of us to strengthen our mental, physical and spiritual well-being. The defining but by no means simplistic battle in life is not characterised by the challenges that we face but how we are able to face the challenges. There is a distinct difference between being confronted by a challenge, such as high stress, low satisfaction, fatigue or inadequate opportunities, and adequately facing said challenge.

When I reflect upon the issue of the abuse of substances, whether alcohol, illegal drugs, prescription or other legally authorised drugs, I wonder whether an individual might fall victim as a result of two variables. Firstly, due to being in an environment that encourages or otherwise facilitates the use of the substance. Secondly, as a coping mechanism to numb the pain of a traumatic experience and/or to avoid the difficulty of more constructively addressing the traumatic experience.

Behavioural scientists state that when human beings are faced with a challenge, we either fight, flee or freeze. The fight mechanism results in us tackling the actual or apparent challenge head on, whereas the freeze and flee approaches mean that we have not frontally faced said challenge. The freeze option represents a situation where we have become so terrified that we cannot do anything about the challenge, while the flee option is where we decide to attempt to get as far away from the challenge as possible. The difficulty with the freeze and flee options are that no attempt has been made to tackle the challenge, but the challenge continues to exist or is able to reoccur without us having developed an experience as to how to tackle it.

In a study conducted in the U.S., 22.5% of the respondents admitted to having used substances during working hours; with the particular substances used being as follows:



Source: drugabuse.com

While some might believe that substance abuse is a personal problem, it represents a serious issue that affects organisations because our personal lives transcend our professional lives. According to the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety, substance abuse may cause the following workplace issues:

- Impairment of judgment, alertness, perception, motor coordination or emotional state, which negatively impacts safety and decision making.
- After-effects such as hangover or withdrawal, which negatively affect job performance.
- Absenteeism, illness, and/or reduced productivity.
- Preoccupation with obtaining and using substances while at work, thus interfering with attention and concentration.
- Illegal workplace activities such as sale or sharing of substances.
- Psychological effects of substance abuse by a family member, friend or co-worker, which negatively affects a person's job performance.

From a Barbados perspective, the National Council on Substance Abuse stated in its April – July 2019 Quarterly Newsletter, “Addressing the world drug problem is essential for promoting health, and peaceful and inclusive societies, and realizing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”.

Against such a backdrop, organisations would be wise to recognise the importance of establishing and maintaining policies on the use of substances, whether legal or illegal, that can impair the thoughts, actions and well-being of those employees who find themselves under the influence of such substances and negatively affect other employees, customers, the organisation’s image and the society.

Substance abuse policies bear a two-fold mandate. First, to maintain a safe and healthy work environment, and second to offer a facility of assistance to employees facing the direct or indirect consequences of substance abuse. Under the Safety and Health at Work Act, 2005 – 12 both employers and employee have a duty to facilitate a safe and healthy work environment; and by extension, the effectiveness of a substance abuse policy requires the collaboration of everyone within the workplace. The policy should be ably supported by an Employee Assistance Programme through which all employees can access professional support to effectively address mental, physical and/or financial challenges that may or have already triggered substance abuse issues.

An emerging issue, which is likely to be of interest to those working with workplace substance abuse policies, surrounds the ongoing global trend of decriminalising specified quantities of marijuana. Ultimately, a balance will have to be found between whatever legislative provisions are enacted regarding substances and legislative provisions on health and safety within the workplace. At the end of the day, it is vital for each of us to be ever cognisant that with all rights come corresponding obligations to others within our society.

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