

RECOGNIZING SUBSTANCE ABUSE/ALCOHOLISM

Among the personal problems that may threaten a worker's job, the most common is substance abuse, and by far the most commonly abused substance is alcohol. While approximately 300,000 Americans are addicted to heroin, about nine *million* are addicted to alcohol.

Alcoholics are people of all ages, from all walks of life. They are distinguished less by the amount they drink than by when and how and why they drink. They usually try to hide their illness even from themselves.

What follows is a checklist to help you recognize a coworker who may need help with an alcohol or other substance abuse problem. Remember: none of the signs described below necessarily indicates a drug or alcohol problem. Even in significant combination, they may indicate *some other type of problem*. However, even some other type of personal problem serious enough to affect work performance calls for an offer of help. The more such indicators are evident in one person, the more likely there is a serious problem.

Inconsistent quality, spasmodic work pace, occasional unpredictable flashes of outstanding performance. Lowered productivity, decreased concentration, mistakes, errors in judgement. Neglected details, carelessness, sloppiness, recklessness, accidents. Inability to remember details and commitments.

Absenteeism & lateness, particularly before and after weekends, various and vaguely defined illnesses, early leaving, extended lunches, unexplained disappearances.

Blaming others for individual's own shortcomings, avoidance of coworkers, inability to get along with others, angry denial of problems, unpredictable/inappropriate behavior, customer complaints, coworker complaints, unreasonable resentments, borrowing from coworkers, overreacting to criticism, aggressivity or belligerence, grandiose behavior, Jekyll & Hyde personality switches.

Deteriorating personal appearance, red eyes, eyewash, dark glasses, tremors, signs of fatigue, increased nervousness.

Poor morale and reduced productivity in others who may be covering for the substance abuser, customer complaints.

Complaints about problems with spouse or children.

Recurring financial problems.

AND MOST ESPECIALLY, a noticeable worsening and/or multiplication of the problems described above, *even though overall performance may not yet have dropped to unacceptable levels*.