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DRUG AND ALCOHOL TESTING IN THE WORKPLACE

The term 'drug misuse' suggests improper use of prescription and over the counter medicines in addition to illicit drugs and other substances (Faculty of Occupational Health Medicine 2006). In the workplace misuse of drugs and or alcohol can cause absenteeism and have an unfavourable impact on performance, quality and safety and productivity (Palmer, Cox and Brown 2006). The aim of this assignment was to discuss the policy applied in a specific work place in regards to Drug and Alcohol testing.

The company's approach to drug and alcohol was first set down in a policy statement introduced in 1992. It was set down as standard in 1997 mandated by the company Health and Safety Policy as one part of the overall approach to health and safety management, and is reviewed every three years. It forms an integral part of the services provided by the Occupational Health Department which is required to promote good health and support staff with issues such as substance or alcohol misuse. Drug and Alcohol testing is carried out on site:

- **Pre - employment** as part of a health assessment to establish fitness for duty, an application for employment will be turned down if a negative result is not declared from the drug and alcohol screen.
- **Pre - transfer** this applies in circumstances where an employee takes up a post which may involve activities for (e.g.) construction or safety case work as well as operations.
- **Pre - classification** prior to becoming a classified worker a drug and alcohol test would be given.
- **Random** sometimes known as **unannounced** testing provides the best means of deterrence and provides information about the extent of drug and alcohol misuse of the company. This is based on a random selection of staff. There is no advance warning and the random sample of people is seen to be impartial.
- **For Cause** If a manager / supervisor believes an individual to be unfit for work and suspect that the individuals uncharacteristic behaviour may be due to drugs or alcohol then they can request an assessment on fitness to work from occupational health to include 'for cause' drug and alcohol screening.

Before any testing could be done the employee would have to give consent, and this means that the employee must fully understand what he is giving consent for and why, which in the circumstances for 'for cause testing' may give cause for concern that if the employee is suspected to be under the influence of drugs and or alcohol, how then can informed consent be given?

As there are two possible outcomes to drugs and alcohol testing, with a negative result being the easiest to deal with, the implications for both employee and employer on a positive result speak for themselves, so therefore provision should be made for dealing with a positive result. Drug and Alcohol testing in the workplace will almost most likely be seen as controversial and there will be those for and against it, but a comprehensive policy which covers the range of issues including what is acceptable, where, when, prohibition rules, testing and disciplinary and treatment procedures, will facilitate the best possible actions. Incorporated into the site policy is the assistance that will be given to the employee in the event of a positive result. They are not automatically dismissed. Counselling and Employee Assistance Programmes are readily available as is the support of the Occupational Health Department.