

Health Notes 3 -Substance Abuse in the Worksite

Does your company have a substance abuse problem? Have you wondered whether substance abuse by workers at home or on the job might be affecting their performance and productivity? Would you know how to handle such problems at your worksite?

You might think of substance abuse as the use of hard drugs like cocaine or meth, but you're more likely to have a problem with a more commonly abused substance: alcohol

In a 2000 study conducted by the Harvard School of Public Health, researchers found that drinking alcohol before or during the day and coming in hungover had the biggest impact on worksite performance. The big surprise, however, is the revelation that the majority (60%) of work-related problems are NOT found among the alcohol dependent employees, but rather, among the employees who are nondependent drinkers who occasionally binge or drink too much. The problem, in other words, might not be where you'd expect.

Another interesting fact that came out of the 2000 study was that "Workplace culture and norms have the potential to influence drinking behavior both at work and beyond the workplace," meaning that policies and educational efforts made at work have a measurable effect on the lifestyle of employees beyond the work environment. This observation supports another well-documented point, namely that promoting wellness at worksites is effective, and worth the investment. And given that most of the alcohol-related problems are associated with persons who are not, strictly speaking, alcoholics, the study concludes that:

"...policymakers should expand their focus beyond alcohol-dependent employees to look at employees who drink heavily from time to time. . . Any corporate strategy aimed only at reducing the consequences of alcohol-dependent employees, even if it is totally effective, will miss the problems caused by the alcohol consumption of the majority (80%) of drinkers, who are not dependent on alcohol."

One way to begin to assess how your company is addressing substance abuse issues is to take this survey developed by City of Portland staff in the Public Health Division, Health and Human Services Department, in partnership with your local Healthy Maine Partnership and the People's Regional Opportunity Program, available at

<http://tinyurl.com/substanceabuseworksitesurvey>

This survey will get you thinking about what you currently have in place at your worksite to address substance abuse at the job. And if you take the survey, you can be entered into a drawing for a \$100 gift card to LL Bean or Cabela's! To learn more, or to seek technical assistance, please contact Healthy Casco Bay at 541-6957.