March 2023 Toolbox Talk - ‘Intoxicants at Work’

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| **Contributor** |
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| **Potential Hazards:**  |
| Currently, Ireland has no health and safety legislation that requires employers to test employees for intoxicants. Because of this, most Irish organisations choose not to implement policies to test their staff for the presence of such substances. In the event that an employee is intoxicated while at work, it can pose several serious health and safety risks. These risks include stress, aggression or violence, and danger while driving, operating machinery, or working at height. Disciplinary action is usually served on the basis of work performance reviews or risk, rather than on the basis of alcohol and substance abuse. So as an employer, what are your duties regarding intoxicants at work? **Your Duties and Things to Look Out For:**As an employer, you have a duty to ensure that employees are not under the influence of an intoxicant to a degree that could threaten safety, health and welfare in the workplace – and employers who knowingly allow employees to work under the influence of intoxicants could be liable to prosecution. With this in mind, it’s important to be able to identify and observe signs of potential drug and alcohol use, such as:* Lateness and absenteeism.
* Unreliability.
* A decline in work performance.
* Impaired concentration, memory, judgement, and physical coordination.
* Sudden mood changes.
* Dishonesty and theft.
* Increased number of errors and accidents.
* Aggression or violence.

Problem drug taking will cause impairment, which can lead to poor decision making and concentration, negative health impacts to the worker, slower reaction times, and increased error rates.Alcohol and the effects of alcohol at work is not only a hazard risk to yourself, but also your work colleagues. Alcohol abuse can have a significant impact not only to individuals but also to work colleagues and potentially their employers. |
| **High Risk Activities:**  |
| * Working at Height.
* Plant and Machinery.
* Slips and Trips.
* Electricity.
* Confined Spaces.
* Manual Handling.
* Driving to and from Work.
* Working with the Public.

The RISK of injury or loss of life is heightened when under the influence of Drugs or Alcohol. |
| **Control Measures:**  |
| * Understand How Substance Abuse Begins and Grows.
* Avoid temptations and triggers.
* Get the Therapies you Need for Co-Occurring Conditions.
* Get to Know Your Risk Factors.
* Maintain Healthy Balance in Life.
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| **For Further Information:**  |
| * A standard drink is a measure of alcohol. In Ireland, one standard drink contains 10 grams of pure alcohol.
* The [HSE low-risk weekly guidelines](https://www.drinkaware.ie/what-are-the-low-risk-weekly-alcohol-guidelines/) are no more than 11 standard drinks for women and no more than 17 for men, these should be spread out throughout the week, with at least 2 alcohol-free days.
* The number of standard drinks is based on the size of the drink and its alcohol strength, usually shown on labels as alcohol by volume (%ABV). The higher the alcohol strength, the higher the standard drink content.
* It takes your body at least one hour to process one standard drink.
* For reference: a pint = 568mls & a pub measure of spirits = 35.5mls.
* For further information or HELP call the HSE Drugs & Alcohol Help Line on 1800 700 700.

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