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Currently, Ireland has no health and safety legislation that requires employers to test employees for intoxicants. Therefore, most Irish organisations choose not to implement policies to test their staff for the presence of such substances. If 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 based on 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?

Identifying a problem & Control Measures

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. 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. The RISK of injury or loss of life is heightened when under the influence of Drugs or Alcohol.

Hazardous and high-risk work activities include but are not limited to:

- Working at Height
- Plant and Machinery
- Slips and Trips
- Electricity
- Confined Spaces
- Manual Handling
- Driving to and from Work
- Working with the Public

Control measures to mitigate these risks include:

- 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

For further information or HELP call the HSE Drugs & Alcohol Help Line on 1800 700 700