

Substance Use and Its Impact

A Guide for Supervisors

As a leader, you are responsible for ensuring a safe, productive, and supportive environment for your team. One of the most critical areas to address in this regard is substance use. Substance use disorders can affect employee performance, safety, and overall workplace morale. By understanding the signs of substance misuse, implementing effective policies, and offering support to employees, postal supervisors can help maintain a healthy, efficient work environment.

Understanding Substance Use and Its Impact

Substance use encompasses the use of legal and illegal substances, such as alcohol, prescription medications, or illicit drugs, which may impair an employee's ability to perform their job duties safely and effectively. Substance use can manifest in various ways, from occasional misuse to addiction. The effects on workplace safety and performance can be severe, especially in roles that require attention to detail, time-sensitive tasks, and physical coordination.

Key Effects of Substance Use in the Workplace:

- **Impaired Decision-Making and Cognitive Function:** Substance misuse can affect an individual's judgment, memory, and ability to make sound decisions, all of which are essential for postal workers who need to follow delivery instructions and safety protocols.
- **Decreased Productivity:** Employees dealing with substance misuse may experience fatigue, lack of focus, or absenteeism, leading to decreased productivity.
- **Increased Risk of Accidents:** Substance use, especially alcohol and drugs, impairs coordination and reaction time, increasing the likelihood of accidents and injuries on the job.
- **Strained Workplace Relationships:** The social and emotional impacts of substance use can lead to conflict with coworkers, which could erode team dynamics and morale.

Signs of Substance Misuse in Employees

Recognizing signs of substance use or misuse early can prevent further issues in the workplace.

Managers should be alert to the following signs:

- **Physical signs:** Bloodshot eyes, slurred speech, excessive sweating, poor hygiene, or unusual body odors.
- **Behavioral changes:** Increased absenteeism, tardiness, unexplained disappearances during work hours, or erratic behavior.

- **Work performance:** Declining quality of work, missed deadlines, mistakes, or an inability to focus.
- **Mood swings:** Unexplained irritability, aggression, or periods of extreme euphoria followed by depression or anxiety.
- **Health issues:** Frequent illnesses, unexplained injuries, or sudden weight loss/gain.

Supporting Employees with Substance Use Disorders

As a postal service manager, it is important to balance enforcement with empathy. Employees struggling with substance use disorders often need guidance and support. Offering resources and creating a culture of care can help employees find the assistance they need and potentially return to full health and productivity.

Steps for Offering Support:

- **Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs):** The EAP offers confidential support for employees dealing with substance misuse. Managers should ensure that employees know about these resources and how to access them.
- **Open Communication:** Foster an environment of trust where employees feel comfortable discussing issues like substance misuse. Encourage employees to reach out for help before their problems impact their job performance.

Education and Awareness

Managers should be proactive in educating themselves and their teams about substance use and its impacts. Regular training can help reduce stigma, raise awareness of the signs of substance misuse, and inform employees about available resources. **Key training elements include:**

- **Substance Use Awareness:** Help employees recognize the risks of misuse, the effects on their health and safety, and the resources available for help.
- **Stress Management and Wellness:** Encourage employees to adopt healthy coping mechanisms, such as stress management techniques and wellness practices, which can reduce the likelihood of substance misuse.
- **Dealing with a Substance-Impacted Employee:** Equip managers with strategies for addressing substance misuse in a non-confrontational and supportive manner. This includes how to approach an employee when you have concerns, how to talk about substance use, and how to offer assistance.

Managing substance use in the workplace is a critical responsibility for postal service managers. With the right combination of clear policies, early intervention, support, and education, managers can foster a safe and productive environment where employees are empowered to seek help when needed. By prioritizing awareness and support, postal supervisors not only ensure workplace safety but also contribute to the well-being of their teams, creating a healthier and more resilient workforce.

For more information and guidance reach out to the EAP. We are here to support you in your efforts to support others.

**EAP counselors have master's degrees and are licensed professionals. Your privacy is protected by strict federal and state confidentiality laws and regulations and by professional ethical standards for counselors. Information you share with the EAP may not be released to anyone without your prior written consent, except as required by law (e.g. when a person's emotional condition is a threat to him or herself or others, or there is suspected child or elder abuse) or the issuance of a court order upon a showing of good cause.*