**Information on Specific Drugs of Abuse**

**Alcohol**

In American society alcohol is a legal drug. In most cultures, it is the most frequently used depressant and is the leading drug of abuse. Ninety percent of U.S. adults have had experience with alcohol. Sixty percent of males and 30 percent of females have had one or more alcohol-related adverse event (e.g. drunk driving).

*Signs and Symptoms of Abuse:*

- Dulled mental processes
- Lack of coordination
- Slowed reaction time
- Slurred speech
- Poor judgment
- Reduced decision-making abilities
- Reduced inhibitions

*Health Effects:*

- Decreased sexual functioning
- Liver disease
- Increased cancers of the mouth, tongue, pharynx, esophagus, rectum, breast and skin
- Kidney disease
- Slows central nervous system and brain function
- Ulcers
- Spontaneous abortion
- Birth defects (alcohol is the leading cause of preventable retardation)

*Workplace Issues:*

- Many employers now test for the presence of alcohol along with other drug testing.
- Consuming alcohol increases the likelihood that a driver or equipment operator will be involved in an accident.
- Even low doses of alcohol reduce inhibitions and affect decision making.
- People who would not ordinarily behave in inappropriate ways can be persuaded to change their behavior when they are drinking.
- Often employees are under the influence of alcohol when they make the decision to use drugs.
Amphetamines

Amphetamines are drugs that stimulate the central nervous system and excite bodily activity. Methamphetamine or crank is one of the fastest growing drugs of abuse. These drugs create less intense and less expensive cocaine-like effects in the body. Many of the so-called designer drugs are related to amphetamines.

Signs and Symptoms of Abuse:

- Mood changes
- Impaired concentration
- Impaired mental functioning
- Swings between apathy and alertness
- Sweating
- Headaches
- Aggressiveness
- Blurred vision
- Dizziness
- Sleeplessness
- Anxiety
- Tremors
- Poor coordination
- Physical collapse

Health Effects:

- Increased heart and respiratory rates
- Elevated or lowered blood pressure
- Rapid or irregular heartbeat
- Seizures
- Coma and death

Workplace Issues:

- Employees who fall under federal guidelines such as the Department of Transportation’s testing regulations are prohibited from using amphetamines without a current prescription.
- The addictive nature and cost can lead to workplace theft and/or dealing.
- Work performance is erratic with periods of high performance and hyperactivity followed by periods characterized by forgetfulness, absenteeism and missed assignments.
Cocaine

Cocaine is the most potent stimulant of organic origin. Cocaine powder is sniffed, snorted or using volatile solvents, freebased. It is also mixed with water and injected into the bloodstream. Crack is a form of cocaine that is easily vaporized and inhaled. Crack has become a very popular form of cocaine, since it is inexpensive and relatively easy to use. Cocaine is a powerfully addictive drug leading to physical and psychological dependence. Tolerance develops rapidly.

**Signs and Symptoms of Abuse:**

- Insomnia
- Tactile hallucinations
- Paranoia
- Anxiety
- Agitation
- Aggression
- Weight loss
- Periods of increased activity followed by fatigue and depression
- Wide mood swings
- Difficulty concentrating

**Health Effects:**

- Dilated pupils
- Increased pulse rate
- Elevated blood pressure, heart rate, respiratory rate and body temperature
- Seizures
- Strokes
- Death by cardiac arrest or respiratory failure
- HIV, AIDS, and hepatitis from use of contaminated equipment for injection
- Tuberculosis and other lung infections
- Death or injury from fire or explosion because of the volatile solvents used when freebasing

**Workplace Issues:**

- Federal guidelines such as the Department of Transportation’s testing regulations require testing for cocaine.
- The addictive nature and cost can lead to workplace theft and/or dealing.
- Cocaine use leads to impaired social and occupational functioning.
- Aggressive and erratic behavior is a common effect of chronic use.
Depressants

A depressant is a drug that depresses the central nervous system, resulting in sedation and a decrease in bodily activity. Depressants, taken as prescribed by physicians, can be beneficial for relief of anxiety and sleeping disorders. The use of depressants can cause both physical and psychological dependence. Regular use over time may result in tolerance to the drug, leading the user to increase the quantity consumed. The main classes of medical depressants are barbiturates and benzodiazepines.

Signs and Symptoms of Abuse:

- Slurred speech
- Staggered walk
- Lack of coordination
- Memory or attention problems
- Altered perception
- Drowsiness
- Sexual or aggressive behavior
- Impaired judgment
- Withdrawal symptoms include restlessness and insomnia

Health Effects:

- Respiratory depression
- Coma and death
- Withdrawal symptoms include convulsions and death
- Pregnant women with addictions can have babies who are dependent and have birth defects

Workplace Issues:

- Mental clouding and drowsiness pose a fitness-for-duty concern.
- Abuse of depressants may result in work absenteeism and tardiness.
- Many employers have work rules requiring the employee to disclose if they are taking any sedating medications that could impact their ability to work safely.
Hallucinogens

Hallucinogenic drugs distort the senses and often produce hallucinations – experiences that depart from reality. Hallucinogenic drugs include lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) and “Ecstasy.”

Signs and Symptoms of Abuse:

- Dilated pupils
- Memory problems
- Panic
- Insomnia
- Fatigue
- Sore muscles
- Headaches
- Loss of balance
- Poor judgment
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Paranoia
- Flashbacks

Health Effects:

- Increased blood pressure
- Convulsions
- Coma
- Irreversible brain damage
- Heart and lung failure

Workplace Issues:

- Employees who fall under federal guidelines such as the Department of Transportation’s testing regulations are prohibited from using hallucinogens.
- Use of hallucinogens causes severe disorientation and hallucinations, which can result in bizarre or dangerous behavior.
- Individuals with hallucinogen dependence can spend days recovering from the effects of drug abuse.
Inhalants

Inhalants are mood-altering substances that are voluntarily inhaled. Most substances used are commercial and household products, such as solvents and aerosols, which are easily obtained and not harmful, if used for the purpose intended and as directed. Because they are common products, inhalants are often a young person’s first attempt at “getting high.”

**Signs and Symptoms of Abuse:**

- Nausea
- Sneezing
- Coughing
- Nosebleeds
- Disorientation
- Fatigue
- Poor coordination
- Visual distortion
- Loss of appetite
- Weight loss
- Confusion
- Muscle fatigue

**Health Effects:**

- Liver disease
- Hepatitis
- Coma
- Brain damage
- Debilitating effects on central nervous system
- Electrolyte imbalance

**Workplace Issues:**

- Inhalants can severely impair judgment and driving ability.
- Inhalants cause severe disorientation, visual distortion and confusion.
- Some such products may be available in the workplace.
Marijuana

Marijuana is a derivative of the hemp plant and is illegally used for its intoxicating effects and dreamy state of relaxation and euphoria. All forms of marijuana have negative physical and mental effects. The active ingredient in marijuana is Delta-9-Tetrahydrocannabinol, or THC, and is present in all forms of the drug.

**Signs and Symptoms of Abuse:**

- Bloodshot eyes
- Dry mouth and throat
- Increased appetite
- Chronic sore throat and cough
- Impaired or reduced short-term memory and comprehension
- Altered sense of time
- Changed sensory perception
- Excessive sedation

**Health Effects:**

- Substantial increase in heart rate
- Emphysema
- Respiratory track and sinus infections
- Lowered immune system response

**Workplace Issues:**

- Employees who fall under federal guidelines such as the Department of Transportation’s testing regulations are prohibited from using marijuana in any form.
- THC is stored in body fat and is slowly released over time. Since it is retained in the fat, an employee can test positive many days after use.
- Many employers have work rules requiring employees to disclose if they are taking any sedating medications that could impact their ability to work safely. This rule would apply even in states that have approved the medicinal use of marijuana.
- The use of marijuana poses fitness-for-duty concerns.
Opioids

Narcotic analgesics are the most effective compounds used for pain relief. Opioids include Morphine, Codeine, Methadone and Heroin. Heroin is usually taken by injection, but it can be snorted or smoked. Tolerance to opioids develops rapidly and addiction is likely.

Signs and Symptoms of Abuse:

- Initial euphoria
- Drowsiness
- Slurred speech
- Memory and attention impairment
- Nausea and vomiting
- Constricted pupils
- Watery eyes and itching
- Low and shallow breathing
- Clammy skin

Health Effects:

- Impaired respiration
- Convulsions
- Coma
- Death
- HIV/AIDS and hepatitis from the use of contaminated syringes
- Addiction in pregnant women can lead to premature, stillborn or addicted infants who experience severe withdrawal symptoms

Workplace Issues:

- Employees who fall under federal guidelines such as the Department of Transportation’s testing regulations are prohibited from using opiates without a current medical prescription.
- Many employers have work rules requiring employees to disclose if they are taking any sedating medications that could impact their ability to work safely.
- The addictive nature and cost can lead to workplace theft and/or dealing.
- Mental clouding and drowsiness pose fitness-for-duty concerns.
Phencyclidines

Phencyclidines include phencyclidine (PCP) and ketamine. They are taken orally, intravenously or smoked. Phencyclidine (PCP) interrupts the function of the neurocortex, the section of the brain that controls the intellect and keeps instincts in check, because the drug blocks pain receptors. Violent PCP episodes may result in self-inflicted injuries.

**Signs and Symptoms of Abuse:**

- Lack of inhibition
- Anxiety
- Rage
- Aggression
- Panic
- Flashbacks
- Hypertension
- Poor judgment
- Disorganized thinking
- Unpredictability
- Loss of pain sensation

**Health Effects:**

- Elevated blood pressure
- Seizures
- Coma
- Respiratory depression
- Amnesia
- Death

**Workplace Issues:**

- Employees who fall under federal guidelines such as the Department of Transportation’s testing regulations are prohibited from using PCP.
- Use of PCP causes argumentative, aggressive, violent behavior.
- Use of PCP can result in missed work obligations and belligerence toward coworkers and supervisors.