

factsheet

workplace alcohol policies

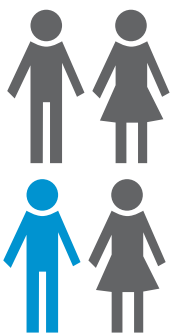
what is a workplace alcohol policy?

An alcohol policy is a formal written statement which sets out the company or organisation's aims, support structures and processes for reducing and managing alcohol problems in the workplace.

A policy shows the company/organisation is committed to providing a safe, healthy and productive working environment for all employees, customers, contractors and visitors involved in its operation.



why have a workplace alcohol policy?



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The impact of alcohol in the workplace can be significant and broad ranging, and can include sickness absence, accidents and injuries, loss of productivity, inefficiency, poor decision-making and damaged customer relations. It can also have negative effects on the mood in the workplace and impact on the stress levels, performance and job satisfaction of colleagues. All of these consequences can impact negatively on a company/organisation's image and can affect productivity, quality standards and profitability (if applicable).

A survey found that a third of employees admit being at work with a hangover from the night before. On any given day, 200,000 British workers turn up for work hungover, which they admit directly impacts on their productivity and safety in the workplace.¹

One in 4 employees in any large workforce typically drink above recommended medical guidelines (more than 14 units a week for women and more than 21 units a week for men), increasing the risk of ill-health, time off work and even loss of employment.²

A workplace alcohol policy clearly outlines clearly the rights and responsibilities of the employer and the employee in relation to alcohol in the workplace. A well developed and robust policy gives guidance and builds confidence in managers and supervisors to appropriately respond to alcohol issues within the workplace should they arise. The policy also provides reassurance to anyone who is having problems with their drinking that they will be treated fairly and sympathetically and support will be made available.

benefits of a workplace policy:

- Reduce absenteeism
- Reduce presenteeism (where someone comes to work but is unable to work to full capacity)
- Improve health and safety
- Increase efficiency and productivity
- Facilitate effective HR management
- Proactive stance encourages early detection of problems
- Promote positive public image of a safety conscious and caring employer



“Turning Point Scotland now have a really robust alcohol policy that has been embedded right across the company. We have also incorporated this policy into our wellbeing at work programme which this year has a focus on stress.”

Wendy Spencer,
Senior Operations Manager, Turning Point Scotland

Employers also have a legal responsibility in terms of the health and safety of staff. The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 ensures no staff member is allowed to work when impaired by the use of alcohol or illegal drugs. In some industries, for instance, transport, workplace drug and alcohol testing is mandatory. A raised blood alcohol level while at work jeopardises both efficiency and safety by increasing the likelihood of mistakes, errors of judgement and accidents. Although there are no official figures for the number of workplace accidents attributable to alcohol, the International Labour Organisation estimate that it could be up to 40%.³

“We now have an alcohol policy for our organisation which shows how to support people if they have an issue. Over and above this, everyone who works here – all volunteers and staff – now have a much greater awareness of the issues around alcohol.”

Peter Lavelle,
Manager, Glasgow Wood Recycling

what should a workplace alcohol policy cover?

Companies/organisations need to design an alcohol policy to suit their particular needs – this will include consideration of the size of the company/organisation and the type of business undertaken. However, all workplace policies will have some common themes which should be covered including:

Aims and objectives

What is the purpose of the policy and who does it apply to? (It is best practice to have the policy apply equally to all staff regardless of seniority and job purpose).

Definitions of alcohol misuse

Explain what is meant by this term in relation to how it could impact on health, work performance and conduct.

Legislation

Set out the legal framework which must be adhered to in terms of health and safety at work.

Policy rules

Outline what is required of all employees to ensure that their alcohol consumption does not have a detrimental impact on their work.

Implementation

Explain who is responsible for the implementation of the policy.

Support and confidentiality

Alcohol issues within the workplace should be treated in the same way as other sickness procedures and an employee experiencing problems with alcohol should be reassured that they will be treated fairly and sympathetically. Support should be offered, both within the workplace and externally if required to help the employee to deal with their drinking. There should also be a statement to confirm that all such issues will be dealt with completely confidentially.

Disciplinary action

Outline in what circumstances disciplinary action would be taken.

Information

Describe the company/organisation's commitment to providing information to the workforce on alcohol and the impact it can have within the workplace.

Monitoring and review

Provide details of when the policy will take effect and how and when it will be monitored and reviewed.



implementing the policy

Training

Training for managers and supervisors on the key elements of the policy is important to ensure they have the knowledge, understanding and confidence to handle any alcohol-related issues which arise.

Information

When developing or updating a workplace alcohol policy it is best practice to keep all staff informed of the process for this, what the policy will cover and when it will be implemented. It can be useful to build this into an alcohol awareness session for staff to promote the benefits of having a policy.

Linking with other workplace initiatives and policies

The policy shouldn't operate in isolation. It is best practice to use it as an aid to good management and complement existing HR and occupational health policies. In addition, many workplaces embed this policy as part of a wider health at work programme and use it to complement other well-being initiatives, for example stress and mental health or healthy eating and exercise.

Monitoring and reviewing

To ensure the policy is up to date, being implemented effectively and continues to be compatible with the latest working practices and needs of the company/organisation it is critical to monitor and review it at regular periods.

A sample alcohol and drugs policy is available on the Alcohol Focus Scotland website.

for more information

If you are concerned about your own or someone else's drinking call Drinkline on 0800 7 314 314 (8am-11pm, 7 days a week).

Scottish Centre for Healthy Working Lives
Tel: 0800 019 2211 www.healthyworkinglives.com

Alcohol Focus Scotland
Tel: 0141 572 6700
or email: enquiries@alcohol-focus-scotland.org.uk
www.alcohol-focus-scotland.org.uk
Follow us on Twitter@[alcoholfocus](https://twitter.com/alcoholfocus)

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<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Health/scottish-health-survey>
3. International Labour Organisation (ILO) (1996),
'Management of alcohol and drug-related issues in the workplace', p. 17

