

13 SIGNS OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE IN THE WORKPLACE



BEAUMONT OCCUPATIONAL SERVICES

13 Signs of Substance Abuse in the Workplace

Drug and alcohol use in the workplace is certainly no laughing matter. An affected employee could cause serious harm to people and property due to an accident or argument.

According to Promises¹, a drug and alcohol addiction treatment center, more than 70% of all substance abusers in the U.S. hold down at least one job.

Confidential studies have revealed that 25% of American workers between the ages of 18 and 34 will use illegal drugs at some point over the course of a year. It's a significant problem that safety managers must be willing to acknowledge and address.

But how can you tell if or when someone is under the influence?

To answer that question, our staff compiled this list of 13 signs from situations they have personally encountered when conducting random, post-accident or reasonable cause drug and alcohol testing:



1. Smell alcohol on the person's breath and clothing

If you are concerned that an employee may be abusing alcohol, discretely check their breath for the scent of alcohol by having a face-to-face conversation with them. If the employee tries to hide their face or avoid the face-to-face talk, this is another red flag.

Other signs include:

- An employee uses an excessive amount of gum or mints to mask their breath
- You notice the scent of alcohol coming off of an employee's sweat
- You notice other odd smells like marijuana or an excessive and unexplained inhalant scent (i.e., white-out, glue, paint thinner, household aerosols, felt tip marker fluid or cleaning products) on the employee's breath, clothing or hair
- You receive reports of intoxication from other employees



2. Employee shows decline in hygiene and personal appearance

- Employee smells of smoke, uncleanliness or other pungent odors
- Consistently wears unkempt or dirty clothing
- Has track marks from needle injections on their arms
- No longer shaves, showers, wears makeup (if they used to do this regularly) or brushes teeth
- Wears long sleeves during inappropriate times to hide scars or needle marks
- Skin and eyes begin to appear yellow
- Appears malnourished
- Has rotting teeth



3. Employee displays jittery or anxious behavior

- Employee may avoid eye contact
- Appears shaky, experiences tremors or other withdrawal symptoms
- Voices paranoid thoughts they've been experiencing or acts upon them
- Suffers delusions or hallucinations
- Exhibits an increased respiration rate



4. Noticeable change of demeanor, attitude, and mood, such as becoming irritable

- Employee becomes emotionally withdrawn
- This is a frequent side effect of substance abuse. In the workplace, this can be due to the fact that employees feel as though they have something they need to hide. Most of this secrecy is due to the fact that they feel they'll lose their job if their supervisor finds out about their substance abuse problem. Because of this, you should address the issue with care.
- Exhibits frequent confusion, unusual hyperactivity or lethargy out of the blue
- Displays frequent mood swings, including becoming depressed, sullen, unusually elated or angry and hostile randomly
- Becomes psychotic, displaying erratic, unpredictable and violent behavior; psychosis, mania or a tendency towards aggression
- Becomes overly enthusiastic
- Experiences an altered sense of space and time
- Display a loss of interest in previously enjoyed activities
- Shows a change in personality
- Lies constantly and provides poor excuses for their failures
- Exhibits a distorted perception
- Acts in a drunk or entranced demeanor
- Acts silly or giddy out of the norm
- Exudes excessive confidence or delusions of grandeur (a deluded sense of power; thinking of oneself as almighty)
- Has a sudden fixation with repetitive motions
- Behaves self-destructive behavior
- Acts impulsively
- Lacks motivation
- Is unusually quiet



5. Employee becomes combative and standoffish towards co-workers, clients and customers

- Employee refuses drug testing
- Has strained relationships with others
- Makes secret phone calls or exhibits other sneaky behavior and has a need for secrecy
- Socially isolates themselves and avoids others

- Blames others for personal shortcomings or problems
- Is extremely defensive, especially when asked about a potential drug problem
- Is unable to maintain employment for very long
- Treats others poorly



6. Physical symptoms, such as glassy, blood-shot eyes, grinds teeth or sweats profusely

- Employee displays weight gain or loss
- Has soot or burn marks on lips or fingers from “roaches” or “joints” burning down
- Has a red or flushed cheeks or face, which could be a sign of drinking
- Has a facial rash or marks around nose and mouth from inhalants blistering the skin (common with inhalant abuse like sniffing paint)
- Has sores or other skin infections
- Has frequent abscesses
- Experiences an increased sensitivity to bright lights, sounds and normal sights
- Exhibits rapid movement- looking busy by frantically moving around but not actually getting anything done
- Displays poor muscle control
- Frequently uses eye drops
- Certain illicit substances are known to affect one’s eyes. The most recognizable changes include eye redness and excessive wateriness or glossiness. Substance abusing individuals may use drops to lessen the symptoms drug abuse has on their eyes.
- Has dilated or constricted pupils under inappropriate lighting
- Has frequent and unexplained nosebleeds
- Is constantly clenching teeth
- Exhibits involuntary eye or body movements, twitching, or verbal tics
- Has a frequent and unexplained runny nose (may be due to snorting drugs)
- Has an excessive number of spray cans in the trash, other paraphernalia such as burnt gum wrappers or foil and spoons are found in their work area, or there is a white powdery residue on desk or their belongings Is constantly itching or skin-picking
- Shivers when it’s warm or sweats when it’s cool
- Has clammy skin
- Often get the chills
- Rubs nose frequently



7. Decline in alertness; the employee doses off or has sluggish speech or movement

- Employee has a slowed reaction time (this could be due to a drug-induced change in sleep pattern)
- Exhibits a rapid rate of speech or increased talkativeness
- Has difficulty speaking
- Nods off



8. Tardiness or excessive absenteeism for no apparent reason

- Employee takes frequent breaks or trips to the bathroom
- Disappears for long periods of time
- Misses work due to frequent emergency room visits and doctor shopping (this might be a sign of prescription drug abuse)
- Has an absence pattern like only Mondays or Fridays, or the day after pay day
- Uses sick leave excessively



9. Passes out at work

- This, along with other health issues such as unusual exhaustion, seizures or convulsions, headaches, random bruising, vomiting, excessive thirst or wetting lips (cotton mouth), or disorientation may be due to substance abuse
- Employee sleeps on the job or at inappropriate times



10. Causes accidents that may injure himself or others

- Employee experiences sudden and unexplained impaired eyesight
- Drives recklessly, or their car becomes increasingly more dented without explanation
- Displays lack of coordination, clumsiness, poor balance, dizziness, stumbling
- Experiences an increased or decreased sensitivity to pain
- Causes or is involved in an increased amount of accidents
- Exhibits impaired judgment or needless risk-taking



11. Overall decline in morale

- Employee is uncooperative
- Has a disregard for the safety of themselves and/or others
- Neglects work obligations due to being preoccupied with finding drugs



12. Co-workers complain about the employee's behavior, including:

- Loss of inhibitions
- Inability to focus or maintain concentration
- Decline in work performance
 - It's nearly impossible to habitually abuse substances and not experience a negative effect on your work performance. For adults, this may mean frequent tardiness, excessive absenteeism, or slacking off on the job for no apparent reason. Normal tasks take longer and need greater effort and the employee may be unreliable when it comes to deadlines and keeping appointments.
- Forgetfulness
- Carelessness, increased mistakes
- Sudden unreliability
- Uncharacteristic loud or obnoxious behavior
- Fails to fulfill responsibilities and work duties, poor performance, struggles with productivity
- Apathetic, distant or lackluster attitude
- Uncooperativeness



13. Theft of property

- Items in the workplace begin to go missing
 - When an employee or co-worker develops a drug or alcohol problem, one of the most common signs reported is having money or other items go missing.
- Financial problems
 - Someone who seems to have frequent financial problems, particularly borrowing from colleagues or asking for wage advances might be trying to support a drug habit
- Employee frequently and falsely files for workers' compensation benefits or claims
- Experiences other legal troubles

Statistics regarding substance abuse and the workplace show that addicts:

- Play a role in 40% of all industrial on-the-job deaths
- Miss 10 days of work for each day missed by regular employees
- Receive employer-covered health care costs three times greater than regular employees
- Are roughly two-thirds as productive as regular workers
- Are 5x more likely to try get worker's compensation
- Are 5x more likely to be the cause of workplace accidents that hurt others or themselves

Don't put your workers or property at risk. If you suspect an employee is abusing drugs or alcohol on the job site, contact us to schedule a reasonable cause test.

¹ <https://www.promises.com/articles/addiction-intervention/employees-substance-abuse-problems/>

Get the peace of mind that comes from knowing your workplace is drug-free. Call us at 409-212-9706 or visit our website: BeaumontOccupational.com.