Issues Paper

Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) Forum

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to summarise the key issues and common themes identified from the Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) Forum which was held on Wednesday 8 April 2009 in Melbourne.

Background

The AOD Forum was organised by the Office of the Federal Safety Commissioner (OFSC) as a result of feedback from key building and construction industry (BCI) stakeholders around the issue of fitness for work, specifically AOD.

Over 100 people attended the forum including industry OHS managers, workplace safety regulators and representatives from unions and industry associations.

Forum objectives

The forum was intended to:
• present participants with a range of information to assist them to understand and manage AOD issues in the workplace
• promote discussion on the topic and provide a valuable networking opportunity to share information and experiences
• identify key issues and common themes.

Next steps

The AOD Forum speaker's presentations and links to AOD workplace management resources and information will be made available on www.fsc.gov.au.

The FSC will distribute this issues paper to industry stakeholders and state and territory workplace safety regulators and publish it on www.fsc.gov.au.

The FSC will encourage stakeholders to share experiences and lessons learnt and invite them to provide copies of their AOD policies to be published on www.fsc.gov.au.

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AOD FORUM

KEY ISSUES AND COMMON THEMES

AOD is an issue for the industry and should be managed like any other safety issue

It was acknowledged that AOD is a concern for the industry and the community in general. The management of AOD issues in the workplace is a safety, productivity and cultural issue and it should be managed the same as other OHS risks.

Many participants felt AOD should be addressed as part of broader 'fitness for work' strategies.

It is critical to have effective strategies but there isn't a one size fits all solution

A holistic approach should be taken, with companies considering what best suits their organisation and culture.

Effective consultation and communication is the key of a good policy

The key to a good workplace policy is effective consultation, ongoing communication, review and re-enforcement of the policy.

There needs to be a balance of employer and employee buy-in and clearly articulated obligations and responsibilities.

Supervisors and managers need to be equipped with appropriate skills and knowledge to manage AOD issues.

There are still many questions about drug testing

There is minimal research on the effectiveness of drug testing in the workplace.

It was agreed AOD testing is not a substitute for good management.

Some considered testing as an effective tool for engagement and early intervention in the management of AOD issues in the workplace.

It is critical for employers to understand the legal implications associated with testing in the workplace. Testing policies and procedures must be able to withstand legal review.

Employers need to be aware that employees may change behaviour to avoid detection. There is also a risk that employees will fail to report near misses and accidents or injuries.

What would assist industry?

- The drug testing industry is unregulated and there needs to be set policy standards in place.
- There is a need for more research, both pre and post testing implementation, to help identify the impact of testing on safety and productivity.
- Companies need to openly share experiences and knowledge – for example, the development of case studies and practical examples to show the pros and cons of testing.
- Stakeholders need access to information defining employer and employee legal rights, responsibilities and obligations.

A structured framework is required

A uniform industry approach or standard, developed by either a regulator or other relevant body would be welcomed. For example, an industry accepted and endorsed framework that covers training standards, education, rehabilitation and minimum guidelines for testing.

Additional research and information is needed.

There is a lack of industry data and statistics available to show the impact of AOD in the workplace. There needs to be appropriate investigation and transparent reporting of incidents to establish the relationship between AOD and OHS incidents. Consideration should be given to the development of a standard protocol.

Open sharing of workplace experiences and policies would help build a better knowledge base to assist the industry develop and implement effective policies.

Appropriate training for managers, supervisors and employees is needed.

Regular forums on AOD would be useful to progress industry awareness and communication. Consideration should be given to including an AOD focus in relevant industry events, such as Safe Work Week 2009.