

# Alcohol and the workplace

## Rights and responsibilities of employees

Alcohol is the most widely used psychoactive (mood-changing) recreational drug in Australia. Alcohol-related problems can be present in almost every workplace.

This fact sheet looks at some of the ways that alcohol can impact on your work and your workplace, and outlines some of your rights and responsibilities as an employee. It provides general information. You should consult with the relevant authorities in your state or territory for more information about your specific situation.

## The impact of alcohol on the workplace

Alcohol misuse can impact workplaces in a number of ways, including relationships, safety and productivity. Alcohol misuse can also affect the general health and wellbeing of employees and impact co-workers, families, friends and the wider community.

Alcohol affects a person's concentration, coordination, decision-making ability and slows reaction times. These effects can have implications for workplace safety, such as operating heavy machinery or driving a vehicle.

Alcohol can also impact relationships with customers, clients and co-workers. Alcohol can affect productivity too, for example through people not turning up to work or people not working to the best of their ability because they are:

- Affected by alcohol or hung-over
- Experiencing alcohol-related illness or health issues
- Experiencing difficulties outside of the workplace due to a family member's alcohol consumption
- Covering for a co-worker who is affected by alcohol or hung-over.

### Alcohol in the workplace scenario

Construction site manager Tony is having drinks over lunch with his colleague Matt. Matt drinks too much and becomes intoxicated. He is driven back to work by Tony and then drives a forklift on site and crashes into the side of another vehicle. Matt is badly injured as a result of Tony not enforcing the site rules of employees having zero blood alcohol concentration when driving a vehicle on site.

### *Did you know<sup>1</sup>:*

- *1 in 20 workers admit to having worked under the influence of alcohol*
- *1 in 10 workers reported they usually drink at work*

## Employer responsibilities

Duty of care requires employers to take all reasonable steps to ensure the health and safety of all employees and any other people who may be affected by the operations of the workplace.

## Your rights and responsibilities

As an employee, you have the right to work in a healthy and safe environment. Your responsibilities are to:

- Take reasonable care for your own health and safety and for the health and safety of people who may be affected by your actions in the workplace.
- Cooperate with employers about any action they take to comply with a requirement imposed by or under relevant occupational health and safety acts or regulations.
- Not intentionally or recklessly interfere with or misuse anything provided at the workplace in the interests of health, safety or welfare.

Make sure you are aware of your rights and responsibilities around alcohol within your workplace and industry.

## Concerned about a co-worker?

If you are concerned that a co-worker is intoxicated while at work, or is coming to work tired or with a hangover, it would be useful to document these incidents.

If your workplace has an alcohol policy, follow the procedures outlined in it.

If your workplace does not have an alcohol policy you may wish to discuss the issue with:

- Your health and safety representative
- A member of the health and safety or other formal workplace committee
- Your manager, supervisor or employer.

Adapted from the DrugInfo fact sheet "Alcohol and the workplace" (2014, [druginfo.adf.org.au/fact-sheets/alcohol-and-drugs-in-the-workplace](http://druginfo.adf.org.au/fact-sheets/alcohol-and-drugs-in-the-workplace)).

1. Pidd, K., Roche, M., & Buisman-Pijlman, F. (2011). Intoxicated workers: findings from a national Australian survey. *Addiction*, 1623-1633.

# Factsheet

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IN THE WORKPLACE**

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