**Know your hazards: Methamphetamine in the Workplace**

Employees adversely affected by illegal drug consumption, such as methamphetamine, can pose a risk to themselves and others in the workplace. This is recognised as a safety and health risk in many industries and can prevent people from functioning in a safe manner. Eliminating as many health and safety risks associated with illegal methamphetamine use is the best way to ensure people adversely affected by this drug do not enter or remain at the work site.

Workers impaired by methamphetamine can demonstrate:

* Violence
* Erratic, aggressive behaviour
* Vomiting
* Hallucinations; paranoia
* Poor judgement, unpredictable behaviour
* Sweating; fevers
* Agitation; anxiety.

**Workplace risks**

Impaired performance, inappropriate behaviour or assault caused by methamphetamine are risks associated with its illegal use in the workplace. There are a number of different hazard factors that could lead to these risks but it is important to note that drug consumption and reactions will affect people differently. As a result, risks vary depending on each individual. Hazard factors that could lead to illegal drug use can include:

* Availability of methamphetamine and other illegal drugs
* Workplace isolation
* Long work hours (and associated risks such as fatigue)
* Inadequate supervision, training or job suitability
* Workplace culture

External use factors can include:

* Addiction
* Mental health
* Social and community environment
* Family

A number of strategies should be adopted to mitigate these risks and prevent illegal substance use in the workplace.

**Workplace risk management and control measures**

Each workplace should conduct a risk assessment on factors that have the potential to cause drug related issues. By focusing on the source of the risk you can manage workplace safety in an effective manner. Implementing management and control measures to then remove or reduce these risks is part of the process.

The varying factors and extent of drug consumption, the nature of the industry and the size and resources of the employer will affect the recommended controls used.

*Some examples*:

For a risk such as **isolation**, employers can establish support networks, encourage social interaction internally and outside of the workplace, and establish communication channels with existing employee assistance programs (EAP) or appropriately qualified personnel.

Employers can also **monitor for impairment** by training supervisors to look out for changed behaviour and ensuring they know how to manage any risks. Providing education and training to employees on drug and alcohol risks, and also ensuring that employees are educated and well informed on workplace policies and procedures is a good start.

**Supporting rehabilitation** by providing information about EAP’s, external resources and educational material. Managing return to work programs with positive support and arranging suitable work arrangements.

**Minimising work impact** can be varied in each different circumstance but some control measures can include eliminating excessive isolation demands from activities, considering work or task rotations, redesigning the activity to require a combination of mental and physical tasks, ensuring rest periods are used, eliminating the need for long shifts to be worked; implementing safeguards on tasks. Monitor employees for fatigue and sleep deprivation, consider these factors when rostering and arranging shifts, and also identify and address interpersonal issues.

**Responding to challenging situations**

There are strategies and resources available to help you manage risk in the workplace when illegal drug use is a concern.

General principles are; safety is paramount, managing the situation and avoiding provocation in a crisis should be a priority and anyone involved should recognise when de-escalation techniques have NOT worked and police assistance should be sought immediately.

The National Health and Medical Research Council recommend an effective three step approach strategy to respond to challenging situations:

1. **Before** – planning and initiation of risk management strategies
2. **During** – direct and immediate response to challenging behaviours
3. **After** – recovery and review

To view these steps in detail, visit Cracks in the Ice [‘Responding to Challenging Situations’](http://www.nationaldrugstrategy.gov.au/internet/drugstrategy/publishing.nsf/Content/07FF9B0DE1B39D7ECA25764D0080C854/$File/chall.pdf).

All workplaces should have:

* Substance abuse policy and procedures
* Employee awareness and education program/s
* Access to an EAP or appropriately qualified personnel
* Drug testing program, where appropriate

Employees affected by illegal methamphetamine consumption can pose a risk to themselves and others in the workplace. It is a serious and complex issue but there are resources available to help employers, and employees, tackle this issue.

**Helpful resources**

If you need emergency support, please call 000 for the police or an ambulance. Alternatively, dial Lifeline on 13 11 14 or the National Alcohol and Other Drug Hotline on 1800 250 015.

Counselling Online offers free and confidential counselling for people using drugs, their families and friends. Visit <http://www.counsellingonline.org.au/>.

[Cracks in the Ice](https://cracksintheice.org.au/) offer trusted and evidence based information for the community through their interactive website where you can find webinars, articles, toolkits, help lines, support strategies and plenty more.

UpCounsel is an American based website but this guide offers relevant and step-by-step processes for small businesses to follow to deal with drug abuse in the workplace - <https://www.upcounsel.com/lectl-employers-guide-to-dealing-with-substance-abuse>.

[Positive Choices](https://positivechoices.org.au/) is an online portal to help community’s access accurate, up to date drug education and prevention programs.

For a more extensive list, visit [when and where do I get help?](https://cracksintheice.org.au/when-and-where-do-i-get-help)

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*References*

Cracks in the Ice website, and ‘the effects of ice’, 2019, <https://cracksintheice.org.au/how-does-ice-work>.

Cracks in the Ice, Responding to challenging situations - <http://www.nationaldrugstrategy.gov.au/internet/drugstrategy/publishing.nsf/Content/07FF9B0DE1B39D7ECA25764D0080C854/$File/chall.pdf>.

WorkSafe Victoria, a handbook for the earth resources industry- *Management of alcohol and drugs in mines.*