



# alcohol

in the workplace

## in the workplace

a simple guide

## alcohol policies

It is estimated that 65% of Scottish companies have an alcohol policy. However, the costs associated with alcohol at work, the impact of current legislation, and the notable links between alcohol and ill health suggest that alcohol policies are becoming an essential part of good business practice. Small and large businesses alike are advised by major bodies such as the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), the Health & Safety Executive (HSE), the Scottish Trade Union Congress (STUC) and the Federation of Small Businesses to adopt alcohol policies.

## why have a policy?

Surveys suggest that employers' reasons for adopting a policy include:

### Staff performance

- 45% of male and 28% of female heavy drinkers report that the after-effects of their drinking affected their work in the past week.
- 75% of problem drinkers are in full-time employment.

### Safety

- 25% of accidents at work are reported as being alcohol related.

### Absenteeism/Sickness

- 6–14 million working days in the UK are estimated to be lost each year due to alcohol-related sickness absence.

### Financial considerations

- It is estimated that alcohol misuse costs industry several billion pounds each year.

### Employee welfare

- A year after receiving treatment, only 7.7% individuals referred for alcohol counselling had been dismissed from their jobs as a result of their alcohol problem.



# legal duties and obligations

Employers and employees are required by law to address the issue of alcohol in the workplace.

This includes:

- the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974
- statutory legislations: eg the Transport and Works Act 1992.

## Employee benefits

The employee can benefit from a good alcohol policy.

Benefits include:

- assistance for those with alcohol problems
- health education
- fair and consistent procedures.

# key steps

To develop a policy the following stages should be observed.

- 1 Seek expert advice from a specialist agency.
- 2 Develop a mechanism to enable management, trade unions and employee representatives to participate in policy development (eg joint working party).
- 3 Develop draft policy.
- 4 Negotiate and consult with key personnel on the proposed draft policy (eg health and safety representatives, occupational health staff, and line managers).

- 5 Amend policy as necessary and, if appropriate, give advanced notice of change of working conditions (eg alcohol-free working environment).
- 6 Implement policy.
- 7 Review and monitor policy on a regular basis.

# the principles

It is necessary that an alcohol policy be underpinned by the following principles.

## A clear statement of intent

A policy should be a written statement of intent outlining how the organisation will deal with the issue of alcohol and problem drinking at work.

## A commitment to joint negotiation

For a policy to work in practice it should be based on joint negotiation and/or consultation between management, trade unions and/or employee representatives.

## Clearly stated policy objectives

Policy objectives generally fall into:

- prevention of alcohol problems at work
- commitment to ensuring the health, safety and well-being of employees
- provision of help for employees with alcohol problems
- procedures for defining the role and responsibilities of management when dealing with alcohol problems at work
- a commitment to education, training and monitoring.



### **Applicable to all employees**

A policy should be applicable to all employees regardless of status. In cases where restrictions are placed on employees in 'safety-sensitive' occupations, policy rules should be clearly explained and defined.

### **Confidentiality**

The maintenance of strict confidentiality is fundamental to a policy.

### **The key elements of a policy**

A policy should:

- address the use and possession of alcohol in and around the working day

Some of the issues that may be considered include:

- the availability of alcohol in the working premises
  - consumption of alcohol in and around working hours
  - alcohol consumption and the use of company vehicles.
- take account of respective legislation
  - adhere to best practice when dealing with disciplinary cases involving alcohol

- establish clear procedures for dealing with employees whose work performance is adversely affected by alcohol

Policy provisions and conditions may include:

#### *Provisions*

- ◇ referral for counselling/treatment
- ◇ discipline held in abeyance, where appropriate
- ◇ protection of present job and future promotion prospects.

#### *Conditions*

- ◇ resolution of work performance problems
  - ◇ consent to a reporting regime with counselling/treatment agency
  - ◇ limited relapse.
- encourage early intervention in alcohol problems via education and training initiatives.

This may include:

- ◇ alcohol awareness campaigns aimed at all employees
- ◇ training seminars for key personnel involved in policy implementation.



## developing a policy

There is no such thing as a standard alcohol policy. Organisations, from the very large to the very small, need to develop a policy to suit their individual needs. The type of policy required will depend upon the nature of the organisation, the culture, size and structure of the workplace and the rationale behind the policy development. It is strongly advised that you seek expert help to assist you in the development of a policy suited to the needs of your organisation.

## developing a policy – agencies that can provide expert help

### **Professional trainers**

The Health Education Board for Scotland (HEBS), the Scottish Council on Alcohol and the Industrial Society have trained a network of professionals on the subject of alcohol in employment. A central list of qualified trainers can be obtained by telephoning HEBS on 0131 536 5500.

### **Health boards**

Have a range of specialists including those from health promotion and occupational health who can provide you with help. To find your local specialist contact your health board (listed under 'Health' in your telephone directory).

### **The Scottish Council on Alcohol**

Can provide in-house specialists in the field of workplace alcohol policies and/or direct you to a network of local alcohol counselling agencies. To find your nearest local contact telephone the Scottish Council on Alcohol on 0141 333 9677.



for more information contact

action notes

