

WorkplaceWellness

a healthy workplace is a great investment

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This issue of Workplace Wellness is brought to you by York Region Community and Health Services. It is available to any workplace in York Region. We encourage you to copy and distribute this newsletter. Our team of health professionals offers information and education on workplace wellness issues at no charge!

Substance Use in the Workplace

Productivity losses due to substance use have been estimated at 24.3 billion dollars per year in Canada.ⁱ In Ontario, substance use-related problems cost workplaces billions of dollars annually. About one-third of the cost is due to drugs (prescription, over-the-counter, illicit) while the remainder is due to alcohol.ⁱⁱ

The most recent Canadian study shows 80 per cent of adults used alcohol, 14 per cent used cannabis, two per cent used cocaine and less than one per cent used illicit drugs, 12 months prior to the survey. Although most individuals who choose to drink do not have problems with alcohol, about a quarter of current and former drinkers report their drinking has caused harm. Generally, the harms reported by substance users impact the crucial areas of home, finances and work.ⁱⁱⁱ

A Workplace Substance Use Policy Makes "Cents"

Available data suggests that in any given workplace, five to ten per cent of the workforce experience serious and acute problems with mental health, substance use or some combination of these.^{iv} Substance use costs the employer directly and indirectly. Issues associated with inappropriate substance use include; absenteeism, errors in production or service delivery, incidents on and off the job, medical/rehabilitation/employee assistance program use, inefficiencies, conflicts among co-workers, turnover and low morale. Problems could arise from substance use either *on* or *off* the job with implications for the workplace.

As part of a comprehensive approach, policy is one effective way to reduce substance use-related problems. A workplace policy is a set of principles, guidelines and rules governing job-related behaviours of directors, employees, employers, contractors, volunteers, agents, students and others. A workplace substance use policy generally serves to increase productivity, reduce safety risks, improve employee health and reduce employer liability.^v

Evaluating Your Workplace Substance Use Policy

There is no doubt substance use can be a sensitive topic but having a workplace policy

in place enables your business to address the issue in a professional and consistent manner. A policy provides supervisors and managers with a resource or procedure to rely on if the need arises and employees can recognize that everyone will be treated equally.

If your workplace already has a substance use policy, how is it working? Is it reviewed regularly and updated as necessary to meet legal requirements, best practices in the field and the needs of your business? What is your workplace doing to ensure the policy is a "living" document?

Evaluating Your Workplace Wellness

It is a proven fact, employees bring some problems to the workplace but the workplace itself also contributes to problems.^{vi} In general, some work-related factors linked to substance use include; high stress, low job satisfaction, long hours or irregular shifts, fatigue, repetitious duties, periods of inactivity or boredom, isolation, remote or irregular supervision and easy access to substances.^{vii} Consequently, it is important to review whether your workplace culture and design of work supports a healthy workplace. Organizations and resources are available in the community to assist your business with the development or review of your workplace substance use policy.

The Substance Abuse Prevention Program and Workplace Wellness Program offer information and consultation on substance use in the workplace and workplace wellness programming. For more information, please contact *Health Connection* at **1-800-361-5653**.

ⁱ Rehm et al. (2006). *The Costs of Substance Abuse in Canada 2002*.

ⁱⁱ Alcohol Policy Network (2004). *Workplace Alcohol Policies*. www.apolnet.org/sano/apn9704.html

ⁱⁱⁱ Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse (2005). *Canadian Addiction Survey. A National Survey of Canadian's Use of Alcohol and Drugs. Prevalence of Use and Related Harm*.

^{iv} Bender et al. (2002). *Mental Health and Substance Use at Work: Perspectives from Research and Implications for Leaders*.

^v Alcohol Policy Network (2004).

^{vi} Bender et al. (2002).

^{vii} Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety(2005). *Substance Abuse in the Workplace*.

<http://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/psychosocial/substance.html>

did you know?

All 9 municipalities in York Region have implemented a Municipal Alcohol Policy (MAP). It is a well established fact that a comprehensive and properly implemented alcohol policy can minimize the number and severity of alcohol-related problems and lower the risk of liability while promoting the health, safety and enjoyment of its participants/guests in municipally owned and operated facilities. For more information on MAPs, visit www.apolnet.ca

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Workplace Wellness Program
Health Connection
1-800-361-5653

Research in Review: Impaired Driving

Alcohol and other substances that alter the normal function of body and mind can lead to collisions on our roadways. In fact, according to MADD Canada, impaired driving by alcohol is the number one cause of criminal death in Canada. What many people may not realize is that impaired driving is not limited to alcohol alone. Other recreational drugs such as marijuana and some prescription or over-the-counter medications can impair your ability to safely operate a motor vehicle or heavy machinery. In 2006 there were 989 people charged with impaired driving related offences in York Region alone (York Regional Police). Workplaces may find the following statistics provide a wake-up call:

- 1 in 5 Canadian workers drinks at some time in the workplace (Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse)
- Over 500,000 Canadians have driven after using marijuana or hashish in the past year (The Traffic Injury Research Foundation)
- Over 80 percent of Canadians report being concerned about the problem of drinking and driving (The Traffic Injury Research Foundation)

Workplace implications:

For many employees, driving is a requirement of the job. If your employees drive company vehicles or their own, consider the following key recommendations:

- Develop a workplace policy which will address employees driving while under the influence of alcohol, illicit or prescription drugs
- Update your employees on new legislation that pertains to the operation of a vehicle such as vehicle impoundment and drinking and driving penalties
- Check regularly to see if your employees have a valid driver's license through the Ministry of Transportation demonstrating that your organization practices due diligence
- Provide education for your employees to address the impact of alcohol and substance use
- Offer referral and support information as appropriate

To verify a valid driver's license through the Ministry of Transportation call: **1-900-565-6555** (\$2.50 charge applied to phone bill) or visit www.gov.on.ca through Service Ontario.

Caffeine fix or not? Try new ways for staying alert at work

Clarifying the controversy . . .

Over the years, caffeine has been one of the most studied ingredients in the food supply. To date, researchers have found no association between moderate caffeine consumption and the increased risk of heart disease, stroke, osteoporosis, or certain cancers. As for the latest discovery on caffeine's positive effect on memory, researchers agree that it is still too early to make any recommendations and that more studies are needed.

Desired Effects:

- enhances alertness
- delays sleep
- can improve performance in some sports

Undesired Effects:

- keeps you awake longer
- short-term increases in:
 - heart rate
 - body temperature
 - breathing rate
 - amount of urine produced
 - blood pressure

What is a safe amount?

Caffeine affects each person differently. It depends on the amount you consume, your age, body size, how you process it and your health. Up to 400-450mg of caffeine a day is considered safe. This is about 2 to 2 ½ cups of filtered-drip coffee. However, consuming more means that you could be displacing nutritious beverages and the undesirable affects of caffeine may last longer.

So next time try other ways to stay alert. . .

- ✓ Get active! Go for a walk, or stretch
- ✓ Have a snack rich in protein e.g. nuts, low-fat cheese and crackers, or yogurt with granola
- ✓ Have a lighter, low-fat lunch instead of a high-fat one (high fat foods stay in your stomach longer because they require more digestion and therefore cause blood to concentrate in your stomach instead of your brain, which makes you sleepy)

For more information call a Public Health Dietitian at York Region *Health Connection* **1-800-361-5653** or visit www.york.ca/nutrition and check out our fact sheets.

Get the Facts About Pregnancy and Alcohol

What is FASD?

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder describes a variety of disabilities associated with drinking alcohol during pregnancy. FASD is the leading cause of preventable birth defects and developmental delays among Canadian children.

Is it OK to have a few drinks while I'm pregnant?

There is no safe time to drink alcohol during pregnancy. Your baby's brain is developing throughout pregnancy. The safest choice during pregnancy is no alcohol at all. In fact, it is best to stop drinking before you get pregnant.

What if a father drinks?

Men who drink alcohol may have a greater chance of having low sperm count making it more difficult for a couple to become pregnant.



If you drank alcohol before you knew you were pregnant, or are looking for information or advice, call:

Motherisk alcohol/substance abuse helpline: **1-877-327-4636**
Umbrellas Program: **1-800-263-2288**
Centre for Addiction and Mental health: **1-800-463-6273**

Reducing costs, assisting staff... it's good business

Cigarette smoking takes an enormous toll on business and industry including increased health care costs and opportunity costs caused by absenteeism, disability and lost time. The Conference Board of Canada estimates it costs employers \$3,396 **more** per year to employ someone who smokes.

A new guide, entitled *Good Business...Better Health*, is now available from York Region Community and Health Services. The guide outlines a comprehensive, smoke-free workplace strategy including smoking cessation tools, resources and a how-to policy guide toward smoke-free grounds.

To further support concerned workplaces, a **complimentary half day workshop** is being offered in York Region on March 28, 2008 entitled *Brief Contact Intervention (BCI) for Smoking Cessation*. BCI takes minutes to do and has proven to be effective in supporting successful quitting.

For information about the guide and the workshop, contact York Region *Health Connection* at **1-800-361-5653** or www.york.ca.



Do you want to join our networking meetings?

Learn what other companies in York Region are doing to promote and sustain wellness. The York Region Community and Health Services Workplace Wellness Program offers twice yearly networking meetings dedicated to:

- Human Resource Professionals
- Occupational Health Nurses
- Health and Safety Committee Members
- Wellness Committee Representatives

There is no cost to attend these sessions. Join us for the morning on February 28, 2008. You will have an opportunity to explore a comprehensive, smoke-free workplace strategy including smoking cessation tools, resources and a preview of the *Good Business...Better Health* how-to policy guide toward a smoke-free work environment.

If you would like to be part of our e-mail invitation list, please contact us at workplace.wellness@york.ca.

did you know?

- A male and female with the same weight and body type, who drink the same amount of alcohol, will notice different effects? Males have more water in their bodies than females; therefore, alcohol gets more diluted and males will notice fewer effects.
- It is incorrect to assume coolers and regular strength beer contain the same amount of alcohol. There is nearly one-and-a-half times more alcohol in a cooler than in one regular strength beer.

Adapted from: About Alcohol. Centre for Addiction and Mental Health.

Test your knowledge of alcohol facts or your alcohol IQ. We've included as an insert, a quiz in this edition of *Workplace Wellness*. Feel free to make copies or post for your employees.

Responsible hosting for workplace social events

Now that the holiday season has arrived, many workplaces will be hosting corporate parties, events and other work-related functions. Before a workplace or employer makes alcohol available at these functions, it is important to be aware of the potential liabilities when hosting, organizing or sponsoring events which involve alcohol.

Workplaces can practice responsible hosting by:

- always having non-alcoholic beverages available
- making sure the bar is attended at all times and has designated opening and closing times
- having food available during the hours the bar is open
- hiring a Smart Serve-trained bartender to

mix standard, measured drinks, or hosting social events away from the workplace or by booking a commercial host (e.g. restaurant, banquet hall) to oversee the provision of alcohol

- offering taxi/bus services or accommodation arrangements to ensure guests who have been drinking do not drive
- encouraging responsible drinking by setting a "tone" for the event that does not emphasize drinking and offers alternative activities such as dancing, games, or eating
- reminding employees drinking and driving is dangerous and is not condoned; remind employees to make alternate travel arrangements and/or take advantage of transportation/accommodation option(s) offered by the employer

UPCOMING HEALTH DAYS

January

Alzheimer Awareness Month www.alzheimer.ca

Jan. 20-26 National Non-Smoking Week
www.cctc.ca

Jan. 23 Weedless Wednesday www.cctc.ca

February

Heart Month www.heartandstroke.ca

March

National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month
www.ccac-acc.ca

National Nutrition Month www.dietitians.ca

April

Earth Month www.earthday.ca

Dental Health Month www.cda-adc.ca

National Cancer Month www.cancer.ca

what's on!

Smart Commute - Choose a better way!

Smart Commute offers a wide array of services to make commuting easier in the GTA:

- Carpooling and vanpooling/exclusive ride-matching programs for employers
- Site assessments and surveys to understand employee commute behaviour
- Shuttle programs
- Emergency ride home programs
- Employee work arrangement solutions
- Incentives and promotions
- Commuter Challenge and other fun events

For more information visit
www.smartcommute.ca

Reducing Harm Through Needle Exchange

To decrease the spread of HIV and other infections that can be spread through blood, such as Hepatitis B and C, York Region Health Services offers a free, user-friendly and confidential and/or anonymous needle exchange program for people who inject drugs and steroids.

Sterile syringes and needles, sterile water, filters, alcohol swabs, tourniquets, containers for used injection equipment and condoms are handed out as requested. Educational materials about resources that assist injection drug users to protect themselves against the risk of HIV, Hepatitis B and C are also supplied. Used injection supplies are gladly accepted for safe disposal, but obtaining new supplies does not depend upon their return.

Needle exchange services are available through the York Region Street Outreach Van.

Call us at **1-866-553-4053**.

Anonymous HIV Testing coming to York Region

Starting in January 2008, anonymous HIV testing will be available from York Region at the Sexual Health Clinic located at 50 High Tech Road in Richmond Hill.

Anonymous HIV testing means that a person can learn his/her HIV status without having to provide any identifying information, such as his/her name or OHIP number. This free test can be done in a short visit and the results are given only to the clients, not to their physicians or to Public Health.

For more information about HIV testing, please call *Health Connection* at **1-800-361-5653**.

Talking to your kids about drugs



Adolescence is a time of independence and testing boundaries and limits. At some point, many young people will experiment with alcohol and/or other substances. While the majority will not have lasting problems from their experimentation, some may have experiences that affect their physical or mental health.

Teens report opinions and advice of parents, guardians and caregivers are very important when it comes to topics such as substance use. Therefore, it is very important to talk to your children about drugs in a realistic and non-threatening way. Acknowledge there may be pressure from their friends to use substances. Set limits and let them know if they chose to use substances, there are consequences. Be a positive role model. Drink responsibly, never drink and drive and show your child you do not need substances to have a good time. Seek out accurate, factual information on the health risks and consequences of using substances.

Recognizing substance use in anyone can be a challenge and this applies particularly to youth. There is not one specific sign of use. Be concerned when you notice your child is acting different from the way you know them to be. This change can also indicate other problems your child may be experiencing such as stress or bullying.

For help or more information please contact:

- Health Connection **1-800-361-5653** (Prevention)
- Addiction Services for York Region **905-841-7007** (Treatment)
- Centre for Addiction and Mental Health **www.camh.net 1-800-463-6273** (Treatment & information)
- Parent Action on Drugs **www.parentactionondrugs.org 416-395-4970** (Information)

We welcome your suggestions, ideas and comments. If you have a topic you would like to read about in a future issue, or if you would like to receive an electronic copy of this newsletter please contact us at workplace.wellness@york.ca

Your workplace substance use policy checklist

Principles of effective policy development

- Take time to create a policy that's right for your workplace; a policy that reflects a workplace's unique culture will promote compliance
- Obtain a commitment from senior management and involve them in policy decisions
- Educate your stakeholders, be consistent with good labour relations principles; get expert advice from key people at different stages of the process
- Ensure your policy covers all employees not just a particular group or classification of personnel
- Respect employee confidentiality and enforce your policies in a fair and consistent manner
- Incorporate employee education and supervisor training into ongoing policy implementation
- Address the broader social and environmental factors contributing to employee stress and substance use issues in the workplace
- Create a realistic long-term, comprehensive implementation plan that includes ongoing educational and promotional activities
- Include an annual review to ensure the policy continues to meet legal requirements, best practice and the needs of your particular workplace
- Be patient; it takes time to develop an effective policy utilizing a consultative and comprehensive approach based on best practice standards

If you would like consultation on developing a substance use policy in your workplace please call, York Region *Health Connection* at **1-800-361-5653**.

Source: Alcohol Policy Network, Let's Take Action on Alcohol Problems in the Workplace, 2001 (updated 2002)

To find out how your workplace wellness program can be featured in a future issue of the newsletter, please call *Health Connection* at **1-800-361-5653**.

