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#### Tips for Employers

- ❖ Be aware and acknowledge that people carry an emotional load that is unique to them.
- ❖ Identify factors that are making it harder for employees to get their job done and determine if adjustments need to be made.
- ❖ Assure employees that they are not alone and that employers are open and receptive to discussions about employees stress and to finding a solution together.
- ❖ Provide access to coping and support resources and services, as well as workplace and leave options without penalty.

This month's big event is the total solar eclipse happening on April 8<sup>th</sup>. Though Connecticut will only see a partial eclipse, 90-95% of the sun will still be eclipsed by the moon. It will grow noticeably darker and show only a sliver of light, beginning around 2:11pm and ending about 4:38pm. While this is not normally a workplace safety issue, many employers may wish to allow their employees, whether they work indoors or outdoors, a chance to view this rare phenomenon.

### Solar Eclipse Viewing

It is important to remember that such events can still expose workers to safety and worksite hazards. The temptation to catch a glimpse of this event can create a distraction. If working outdoors, employees should be sure to turn off any equipment or machinery before sun-gazing.

So what information can employers pass on to their employees to reduce the risk of worksite or on-the-job injuries. NASA's Total Solar Eclipse safety page suggests the following;

- Never look directly at the sun during the eclipse. Sunglasses will NOT protect your eyes.
- Only use approved eclipse glasses or handheld solar viewers verified to be compliant with international safety standards.
- Always inspect your solar filter before use, if scratched or damaged, discard and do not use. Make sure you follow all instructions that come with the filter to ensure proper use.
- Do not look at the sun/partial eclipse through a camera, telescope, binoculars or any other optical device, even while using proper eclipse glasses or handheld solar viewers, the concentrated solar rays will damage the filters and potentially cause serious injury to your eyes.
- Keep normal eyeglasses on, if normally worn, and place eclipse glasses over them.

### Workplace Mental Health

Mental health is an important component of overall well-being and is equally as vital as physical health for all employees., Mental health concerns due to work have the potential to adversely impact an employee's social interactions, productivity, performance, and absenteeism.

Burnout is a pervasive form of stress that is directly tied to work, and the instances of burnout are on the rise. Co-worker or management conflicts are also a leading cause of stress in the workplace.

- 83% of US workers suffer from work-related stress, with 25% saying their job is the number one stressor in their lives.
- About one million Americans miss work each day because of stress.

Stress affects people in a variety of ways such as muscle tension, headaches, stomach discomfort, high blood pressure, and heart disease. Ignoring workplace stress can have lasting harmful effects on individuals, families, co-workers, and communities.

Employers can help change the stigma of mental health by prioritizing it as part of their workplace culture, having conversations about it, and knowing how to support those workers who say they need assistance.

For more information, visit <https://www.osha.gov/workplace-stress>



### **How to approach an employee suspected of alcohol problem.**

- Meet the employee privately and away from coworkers.
- Keep clear documentation of your concerns with specific examples.
- Point out patterns of poor performance or attendance.
- Possess a questioning, calm tone rather than an accusatory one.
- Give the employee a chance to talk about what is going on.
- Work with employee to approve attendance and performance and follow through with progressive discipline if issues don't improve.
- Of course if someone's behavior is disruptive or visibly intoxicated, a manager or HR should address the situation immediately.

## **Alcohol abuse in the workplace**

More than an estimated 14 million people meet criteria for alcohol use disorder (AUD) in the United States. Thus, it's almost inevitable that the effects of problematic drinking sometimes spill over into the work environment. SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) studies have estimated that as many as 9% of full-time U.S. workers are affected. Absenteeism among people with AUD is roughly 4-8 times higher. There is also a higher rate of workplace injuries and lost productivity due to poor work performance.

### **What are potential signs and symptoms of alcohol influence at work?**

A handbook for supervisors published by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management points to several signs. While not always indicative that the issue is related to alcohol, these can be red flags or potential indicators of problematic drinking.

1. Having a lot of Friday or Monday absences, frequent tardiness, and a need to tend to various "emergencies" that arise on a regular basis.
2. A decline in work performance such as frequently missed deadlines, numerous careless mistakes, not completing assignments, and/or sudden inability to meet production numbers.
3. Increased interpersonal conflict with coworkers. Employees who struggle with a drinking problem are more likely to experience strained relationships with coworkers or isolate themselves from others completely.

However, additional signs of an employee struggling with alcohol may be more immediately obvious;

- Smelling of alcohol
- Unsteady gait
- Bloodshot eyes
- Body shakes or tremors
- Falling asleep on the job
- Changes in mood and behavior

### **How to support an employee struggling with AUD**

The most important thing is to not ignore a potential issue with alcohol in the workplace. If they ask for help, take them to an HR representative. Do not cover for them, make excuses or do anything that enables them to continue these behaviors.

There are laws, such as the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) and FMLA which may influence workplace handling of alcohol addiction. Of course, other laws and legal consequences may vary from one state to another. Many regulations depend on the particular workplace policies in effect, such as policies that indicate the workplace as an alcohol free workplace and/or that employees can be tested randomly or per workplace accidents.

Many workplaces have an Employee Assistance Program in place to that offer confidential help for AUD.

Employees may call SAMHSA's National Helpline, it's free, confidential and available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Treatment referral and information services are available in English and Spanish. The number is 1-800-662-HELP (4357), or for more information visit <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline>.

Ultimately it's up to each individual, but with assistance, they can get help and stay safe!