Many workplaces are dangerous enough without adding the extra hazard of workers under the influence of drugs and alcohol. When workers are high or drunk on the job, they pose a safety risk to themselves and their co-workers. One logical way to address this risk is to test workers for drugs and alcohol. But drug and alcohol testing policies are enforceable only when they respect workers’ privacy and civil rights and are designed to further legitimate safety concerns. As a result, courts, arbitrators and labour boards subject testing policies to strict scrutiny.

This Special Report explains:

- The law and legal principles that relate to drug and alcohol testing, including the Supreme Court of Canada’s recent decision on random alcohol testing;
- The seven basic rules for testing; and
- The key elements of an enforceable testing policy.

There are also links to additional online resources, including guidelines on testing from various human rights commissions and safety talks. Plus, there’s a safety talk on drug and alcohol in the workplace that you can give to workers.
The law on drug and alcohol testing largely comes not from statutes or regulations but from the decisions of courts, arbitrators, labour relations board and human rights tribunals (which, for simplicity's sake, we'll refer to collectively as "courts"). So to determine what your company can and can't do, look at where courts have drawn the lines on testing and structure your company's drug and alcohol testing policies accordingly.

To that end, we've gathered up the leading cases in this area and broken them down into seven basic rules. The “Scorecard” on p. 10 summarizes these cases.

**Defining Our Terms**

Except where the context requires otherwise, when we use the terms “drugs” or “drug testing,” we’re referring to testing for both drugs and alcohol. In addition, this Special Report addresses testing of current employees only; it doesn’t cover pre-employment testing of job applicants, which has slightly different standards.

**TESTING & HUMAN RIGHTS LAWS**

The most common argument workers use to attack drug testing is discrimination. In fact, the human rights commissions in seven jurisdictions—Fed, AB, MB, NL, NT, ON and PE—have published drug testing guidelines. For example, the federal Canadian Human Rights Commission revised its drug and alcohol testing policy in October 2009.

Human rights laws bar employers from discriminating against individuals with a physical or mental disability. The laws also bar discrimination on the basis of a “perceived” disability. And they require employers to accommodate workers with disabilities to the point of “undue hardship.”

Drug addiction and alcoholism are considered disabilities under these laws. So employers can’t treat workers who have substance abuse problems differently from other workers. In addition, treating a worker unfavourably because you think he has a drug addiction is disability discrimination even if your suspicions turn out to be wrong. Consequently, drug testing may discriminate against both drug addicts and non-drug addicts.

However, employers can justify an otherwise discriminatory practice and rule if it’s what’s called a “bona fide occupational requirement” (BFOR) designed to carry out legitimate, non-discriminatory purposes, such as ensuring workplace safety. So as long as a drug testing policy is motivated by a sincere, good faith concern for safety—as opposed to a pre-
text to cover an ulterior motive—drug testing may be permitted as a BFOR.

But to qualify as a BFOR, the safety-related practice or policy must also be “reasonably necessary” to serve that legitimate, non-discriminatory purpose. In other words, if there’s a non-discriminatory way to ensure safety, the employer can’t follow the discriminatory practice. It’s this “reasonably necessary” test that causes most of the problems when it comes to drug testing. That’s because testing isn’t considered to be reasonably necessary if there are less intrusive alternatives available.

Even if a drug testing policy satisfies the reasonably necessary test, its terms must still be consistent with the employer’s duty to accommodate. That is, the policy must address what steps the company will take to accommodate a worker who has a drug addiction or is an alcoholic. For example, a drug testing policy that requires the automatic termination of a worker who fails a drug or alcohol test without the opportunity for assessment or accommodation of the worker’s disability, such as sending him to rehab, is likely to be considered discriminatory.

PRACTICAL POINTER: Although the human rights arena is the main battleground, drug testing policies can also provoke other kinds of legal disputes, including privacy complaints and allegations that the policy violates the terms of the collective agreement.

Why Cases Are So Critical

Cases on drug testing are important because they show how courts decide if testing is a BFOR. Yes, different courts may analyze similar facts differently. And there are subtle differences in the human rights codes of the various jurisdictions. Still, the cases are a reliable source of guidance. Moreover, there are a handful of leading cases on drug testing that are followed throughout Canada.
Impact and Cost of Substance Abuse in the Workplace

According to the Addictions Foundation of Manitoba, substance abuse can affect the workplace in many ways, including not only the worker but also co-workers and the company itself. Early intervention reduces the impact on a worker’s health and other major life areas, can save the company money and provide a better chance of success for the worker. Some of the specific impacts can be felt in these areas:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Affected Person</th>
<th>Co-Workers</th>
<th>Business/Workplace</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Increased illness</td>
<td>• Covering for the person</td>
<td>• Increased absenteeism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Increased accidents/self-injury</td>
<td>• Increased number of interpersonal conflicts</td>
<td>• Increased accidents and possibly death rates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Problems with family, friends, co-workers, legal issues, financial issues</td>
<td>• Reduced morale</td>
<td>• Increased costs (insurance, worker's comp, cost of temporary staff)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Loss of wages or job</td>
<td>• Increased stress</td>
<td>• Reduced productivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Loss of self-esteem/respect</td>
<td>• Unsafe work environment</td>
<td>• Damage to equipment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Increased risk of injury</td>
<td>• Loss of customers/business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Company theft</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although it’s hard to measure the true economic costs of workplace substance use in Canada, it has been estimated that annual productivity losses are as high as $11.8 billion ($4.1 billion for alcohol and $823.1 million for illegal drugs) [See, Alcohol, Drugs and Gambling in the Workplace, AADAC, 1998]. There are significant human and economic costs, both direct and indirect.
7 Rules of Drug & Alcohol Testing

Based on the leading cases from across Canada, here are the seven basic rules of drug and alcohol testing:

Random Testing of Non-Safety-Sensitive Workers Is Illegal

Testing rules differ depending on the kind of worker being tested. The courts distinguish between two groups:

1. Workers who occupy safety-sensitive positions, such as bus drivers and forklift operators; and

2. Workers who don’t, such as clerks and accountants.

In the landmark case of *Entrop v. Imperial Oil Ltd.*, [2000] CanLII 16800 (ON C.A.), July 21, 2000, an Ontario court ruled that an employer can’t perform random drug and alcohol testing on workers who don’t have safety-sensitive jobs. All of the existing government drug testing guidelines follow this rule. But as you’ll see below, employers have more leeway to test workers in safety-sensitive positions.

Random Alcohol Testing of Workers in Safety-Sensitive Positions May Be OK

*Entrop* ruled that random breathalyser testing for alcohol use is acceptable for workers in safety-sensitive positions. A positive test result is a reliable indication of impairment, the court explained, because most people don’t function well at certain blood alcohol levels. In addition, the court noted that, unlike drug tests, alcohol tests can determine whether a worker is currently impaired.

However, in the newest court case in this area, the Supreme Court of Canada recently addressed the legality of random alcohol testing of workers at a paper mill and concluded that, based on the facts of that case, the mill’s random alcohol testing policy was too invasive of workers’ privacy. The Court said that mandatory random testing of workers in a dangerous workplace is an unjustified invasion of privacy unless there’s evidence of a general problem with substance abuse in the workplace. Although the paper mill was a “dangerous work environment,” it didn’t prove that it had a general problem with workplace alcohol abuse. There had been eight incidents of alcohol consumption or impairment at the mill in a 15-year period—and no actual safety incidents, injuries or near misses tied to alcohol use—which wasn’t sufficient to establish an overall alcohol problem that would warrant universal random testing. In fact, in the 22 months that the policy was in effect, no worker tested positive for alcohol, further indi-
So in light of the Supreme Court’s decision, random alcohol testing of workers in safety-sensitive positions in dangerous workplaces is likely to be held permissible provided that there’s sufficient evidence of an alcohol problem in the workplace.

Random Drug Testing for Safety-Sensitive Workers Is Usually Illegal

Random drug testing, however, is a different matter and is usually barred. The rationale for not allowing random drug testing comes from Entrop. As mentioned above, the court found that, unlike tests for alcohol use, drug tests don’t necessarily indicate whether the worker is impaired at the time of the test. In other words, if a worker smoked marijuana a couple of days ago, he could test positive for drugs even though the “buzz” had worn off and he wasn’t actually impaired by the time he took the test.

Exceptions: Random drug testing of workers in safety-sensitive positions has been found to be a BFOR on several occasions. For example, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal has ruled in at least two cases that randomly drug testing drivers who drove into the US was okay because the policy was necessary to ensure compliance with US Department of Transportation regulations allowing for random drug testing of drivers in US territory [Allied Systems (Canada) Co. v. Teamsters Local Union 938 (McLean Grievance), [2008] CanLII 13354 (ON L.A.), March 28, 2008]. In addition, random drug testing may also be allowed for safety-sensitive workers returning to work after a drug use suspension to ensure that rehabilitation’s working and that they’re abiding by the terms of a “last chance” agreement.

PRACTICAL POINTER: In 2007, an Alberta court rejected Entrop’s conclusion that drug tests don’t detect current impairment but did so in the pre-employment testing context. It ruled that a construction company could withdraw a job offer for a safety-sensitive position because the applicant tested positive for marijuana. This court concluded that because the effects of casual drug use can sometimes linger in one’s system for several days, drug testing does detect a current impairment [Alberta (Human Rights & Citizen. Commission) v. Kellogg, Brown & Root (Canada) Co., [2007] ABCA 426 (CanLII), Dec. 28, 2007].

Post-Incident/Reasonable Cause Testing of Safety-Sensitive Workers OK

Although random drug testing is generally illegal, it’s typically acceptable to test a worker for either drugs or alcohol after a safety incident occurs and/or when there’s “reasonable cause” to believe that the worker is impaired, provided that the worker has a safety-sensitive job. At least one federal court has taken this position [Canadian National Railway Co. v. National Automobile, Aerospace, Transp. & General Workers Union of Canada, [2007] CanLII 43492 (ON L.A.), Oct. 16, 2007].

The human rights commissions also acknowledge the legality of post-incident/reasonable cause testing. For example, Manitoba’s drug testing guidelines say “post-incident testing, especially in safety-sensitive jobs, may be easier to justify, as may be situations where the smell of alcohol or cannabis smoke raises a reasonable suspicion of alcohol and/or drug use, or in situations where there are other reasonable grounds to believe that impairment may be present.”

But post-incident testing may cross the line if it’s too broad. For example, an Alberta arbitrator rejected a policy that subjected all workers to mandatory test-
ing after incidents unless their supervisors had reason to believe drugs and alcohol were not involved. The policy should have been reversed, said the arbitrator. In other words, testing should have been required only if the supervisor did suspect alcohol or drug use [Communications, Energy & Paperworkers Union, Local 707 v. Suncor Energy Inc., [2008] A.G.A.A. No. 55, Sept. 3, 2008].

No Post-Incident/Reasonable Cause Testing of Non-Safety-Sensitive Workers

Although post-incident/reasonable cause testing of workers in safety-sensitive positions is generally permitted, it's less clear whether it's okay to do post-incident/reasonable cause testing of workers not in safety-sensitive positions. Theoretically, an employer could prove that such testing was reasonably necessary to ensure safety. But it would be hard to justify the necessity of such a policy for workers whose jobs don’t affect safety. For example, a court struck down a bank’s attempt to impose such testing on tellers and clerks in non-safety sensitive positions [Canadian Human Rights Commission v. Toronto Dominion Bank, [1998] 4 F.C. (CanLII), July 23, 1998].

Testing Workers Before Moving to Safety-Sensitive Positions Is OK

Although workers in non-safety-sensitive positions can’t be subjected to drug and alcohol testing, they may be required to submit to such testing before being moved to positions that are safety-sensitive [Re: CNR Co. and C.A.W. Canada, 95 L.A.C. (4th) 341, July 18, 2000].

Testing Policy Must Accommodate Worker

Testing policies that comply with the above rules must still be consistent with the employer’s duty to accommodate, which raises two issues:

- What, if any, accommodations employers must make before requiring workers to submit to testing in the first place; and

- What penalties can employers impose on workers for failing (or refusing to take) drug tests.

One clear rule: Drug testing policies must account for each worker’s individual circumstances and characteristics. Blanket policies that treat all workers the same violate the duty to accommodate. Accordingly, “zero tolerance” policies that provide for mandatory random testing and/or automatic termination after positive tests are problematic. Instead, the Manitoba guidelines suggest that the reasonable accommodation duty may require an employer to:

- Explore the possibility of transferring the worker to a less safety-sensitive position;

- Permit—and, in fact, encourage—the worker to participate in an appropriate worker assistance program; or

- Grant a reasonable leave of absence to allow the worker to participate in and complete a rehabilitation program.

Bottom line: These seven rules aren’t set in stone. But they do represent the outlines of what has emerged as a national consensus on the legality of testing current workers for alcohol and drug use on the job.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Workers in Safety-Sensitive Positions</th>
<th>Workers in Non-Safety-Sensitive Positions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Random Drug Testing</td>
<td>Probably not</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Random Alcohol Testing</td>
<td>Yes, if there is an alcohol problem in the workplace</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Incident Drug Testing</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Probably not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Incident Alcohol Testing</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Probably not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasonable Cause Drug Testing</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Probably not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasonable Cause Alcohol Testing</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Probably not</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Here’s a look at the leading cases involving drug and alcohol testing. Because this issue is complicated, don’t be surprised to see some of the same cases on both sides of the Scorecard.

**EMPLOYER WINS**

**Entrop: Random Alcohol Testing of Safety-Sensitive Workers**


**McLean Grievance: Random Drug Testing of Safety-Sensitive Workers**

Random drug testing of drivers who transport vehicles to dealers in the US is a BFOR. Under US Department of Transportation regulations, drivers on US roads are subject to random drug testing even if they’re from another country. So the trucking company had to impose the policy to ensure compliance with a foreign law [*Allied Systems (Canada) Co. v. Teamsters Local Union 938 (McLean Grievance)*, [2008] CanLII 13354 (ON L.A.), March 28, 2008].

**CNR: Post-Incident Drug Testing of Safety-Sensitive Worker**

Railway company could discipline a rail car inspector for refusing to submit to a drug test after getting into a truck accident at work. Tests aren’t random, the Ontario arbitrator explained, as they occur after incidents or where there are other grounds for suspecting substance abuse. Although testing after any incident isn’t necessarily valid, it was a BFOR in this case given the fact that the inspector’s driver’s licence had been suspended and that he did a lot of damage to the truck [*Canadian National Railway Co. v. National Automobile, Aerospace, Transp. & General Workers Union of Canada*, [2007] CanLII 43492 (ON L.A.), Oct. 16, 2007].

**EMPLOYER LOSES**

**Entrop: Random Drug Testing of Safety-Sensitive Workers Not OK nor Is Automatic Termination**

The same case that said employers could do random alcohol testing of safety-sensitive workers ruled that random drug testing of safety-sensitive workers is invalid. Indicators of drug use can linger in the system and people can test positive even though they’re not currently impaired when they take the test. In addition, the part of the testing
policy calling for automatic firing after one positive test is overly restrictive and violates the duty to accommodate as it doesn’t consider the worker’s circumstances in determining what penalties to impose [Entrop; same ruling reached in Imperial Oil, cited above.]

Irving Pulp: Random Alcohol Testing of Safety-Sensitive Workers OK if Alcohol Problem in the Workplace

A paper mill in New Brunswick implemented a policy of annual mandatory random alcohol breathalyser tests of 10% of all workers in safety sensitive positions. The Supreme Court of Canada ruled that although the paper mill was a “dangerous work environment,” it didn’t prove that it had a general problem with workplace alcohol abuse. And mandatory random testing of workers in a dangerous workplace is an unjustified invasion of privacy unless there’s evidence of a general problem with substance abuse in the workplace [Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada, Local 30 v. Irving Pulp and Paper Ltd., [2013] SCC 34 (CanLII), June 14, 2013].

C.A.W.: Post-Incident Testing Okay but Discipline Doesn’t Accommodate

Post-incident/reasonable cause testing of safety-sensitive workers is okay. However, the part of the policy calling for mandatory termination upon a positive test was a violation of the company’s duty to accommodate a person with a disability [Re: CNR Co. and C.A.W. Canada, 95 L.A.C. (4th) 341, July 18, 2000].

CNR: Testing Okay but Discipline Doesn’t Accommodate

The same case that upheld post-incident drug testing of a safety-sensitive worker after a truck crash at work ruled that firing the worker for refusing the test was too harsh, especially because he submitted to alcohol testing and his refusal was advised by the union [Canadian National Railway Co. v. National Automobile, Aerospace, Transp. & General Workers Union of Canada].

Suncor: Post-Incident Testing of Safety-Sensitive Worker


Toronto Dominion Bank: Random Testing of Non Safety-Sensitive Workers

Key Elements of a Drug Testing Policy

Drug testing policies are complex and, in unionized workplaces, highly negotiated. So in most cases, you won’t be able to take a boilerplate drug testing policy and use it at your company right out of the box. Instead, you’ll have to craft a policy that reflects your workplace, company safety rules and the terms of the collective agreement. But you don’t have to create a testing policy whole cloth. A model policy is a great place to start and base your negotiations with the union. (At OHSInsider.com, you can download several model testing policies.)

In general, your company’s drug testing policy should contain the following key elements:

Policy statement. Include a statement explaining the purpose and objectives of the drug testing policy, emphasizing the company’s commitment to a healthy and safe work environment.

Definitions of key terms. Define the key terms used in the policy. For example, the legality of drug testing in many ways turns on whether the worker in question has a safety-sensitive position. To review, an employer generally can’t perform random drug and alcohol testing on workers who don’t have safety-sensitive jobs. Thus, it’s critical that you define “safety sensitive position” or spell out the criteria that will be used to determine if a worker’s position is safety-sensitive. In addition, your policy should define:

- Alcohol, drugs and drug paraphernalia;
- Workplace;
- Incident, including whether it covers near misses;
- Negative and positive test results; and
- Reasonable grounds.

Explanation of the policy’s scope and application. The policy should explain who is and isn’t covered by the policy, such as full-time workers, part-time workers, interns, contractors’ workers, etc. It should also explain the circumstances under which the policy applies. For example, state that the policy applies only to workers in safety-sensitive positions (as defined in the policy). However, you should also note that although workers in non-safety-sensitive positions can’t be subjected to random drug and alcohol testing, they may be required to submit to such testing before being moved to positions that are safety-sensitive.

Standards regarding drug and alcohol use. Spell out the standards the company expects workers to meet as to illegal drug use and possession and alcohol
use and possession. For example, state that workers are prohibited from using drug and alcohol while working. Also explain whether the policy applies when workers are offsite but doing work on the company’s behalf. And as to alcohol use and possession, include any specific exceptions for social events, such as company picnics or holiday parties.

**PRACTICAL POINTER:** You may also want to consider including language on prescription or over-the-counter drug use and possession in the workplace because the use of such legal drugs, such as pain medication, can affect workers’ performance and impact safety.

**Testing standards.** Explain when workers may be required to submit to drug and/or alcohol tests. It’s important to distinguish the standards based on:

- **Random testing.** The legality of random testing depends on whether you’re testing for alcohol or drugs. Random breathalyser testing for alcohol use may be acceptable for workers in safety-sensitive positions provided there’s evidence of an alcohol problem in the workplace. So if your company plans to conduct random alcohol testing of workers in safety-sensitive positions, this section is where you’d explain how such tests will be conducted.

- **Incident-related or “reasonable cause” testing.** Although *random* drug testing is generally illegal, employers are generally permitted to test a worker for either drugs or alcohol after a safety incident occurs and/or when there’s “reasonable cause” to believe that the worker’s impaired—provided that the worker has a safety-sensitive job. (See, Model Post-Incident Drug and/or Alcohol Testing Procedures; Checklist for Reasonable Cause Testing for Drugs and/or Alcohol.)

You should also explain the types of test to be used (urine, blood, hair), who’ll perform the tests and the testing procedures to be used, including who’ll have access to the test results.

**Procedures to be followed if a violation is suspected.** Set out the procedures the company will follow if it suspects a worker of violating the policy, including how investigations into such violations will be conducted.

**Consequences of a policy violation.** State the possible disciplinary actions if the company determines that a worker has violated the policy, such as suspension with or without pay, demotion or other disciplinary action up to, and including, termination. Remember that testing policies must be consistent with the employer’s duty to accommodate and account for each worker’s individual circumstances and characteristics. Blanket policies that treat all workers the same violate the duty to accommodate as do “zero tolerance” policies that provide for automatic termination after positive tests.

Be sure to differentiate between types of violations. For example, refusing to take a drug test shouldn’t be treated the same as failing to take a test. In addition, spell out options for accommodating workers with alcohol or drug problems, such as referral to a substance abuse professional for assessment of a possible alcohol or other drug problem or the use of a “last chance” agreement.

**BOTTOM LINE**

Drug and alcohol testing is a tricky issue and a very sensitive one. So you might be tempted to not bother trying to implement a testing policy. But doing so could be a big mistake, especially if you’re in a hazardous industry. If workers are coming to work drunk or high—or getting drunk or high at work—you need to know so that you can make sure the company takes appropriate steps to protect those workers and their co-workers from being injured or killed due to their intoxication.
Guidelines on Drug and Alcohol Testing

The human rights commissions for several jurisdictions have published drug testing guidelines based on the rulings of the leading cases. Here are links to these guidelines:

- **Canadian Human Rights Commission**: Policy on Alcohol and Drug Testing
- **Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission**: Information Sheet on Drug and Alcohol Dependencies in Alberta Workplaces
- **Manitoba Human Rights Commission**: Drug and Alcohol Testing in the Workplace
- **Human Rights Commission Newfoundland and Labrador**: Employers Guide to the Human Rights Code (see page 15 for guidelines on employment-related drug and alcohol testing)
- **Ontario Human Rights Commission**: Policy on Drug and Alcohol Testing

Resources on Drugs and Alcohol in the Workplace

- **National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism**: The Workplace and Alcohol Prevention Problem
- **Centre for Addiction and Mental Health**: Substance Use Policy Development Worksheet
- **Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), UK**: Managing Drug and Alcohol Misuse at Work

Safety Talks on Drug and Alcohol

At Safety Smart, you can get the following safety talks for workers on drugs and alcohol (Not a Safety Smart member? Sign up for a [free day trial]):

- Alcohol and Safety Don’t Mix!
- Be Straight and Sober for Work
- Cocaine Compromises Everyone’s Safety
- Meth Is No Solution
- Drug and Alcohol Abuse—Not in Your Backyard?
- Marijuana Use at Work—It’s Everybody’s Business
- Ordinary, Everyday Drugs Can Cause Accidents
- Substance Abuse Affects Everyone
- You Deserve a Drug-Free Workplace

On pages 15-16 is a safety talk you can print out and give to workers on the dangers of alcohol and drugs in the workplace and the importance of reporting intoxicated co-workers.
Would you consider putting your life into the hands of a surgeon who was known to be a pill-popping fanatic? Or how about an airline pilot who uses cocaine? What about entrusting your children to a school bus driver who downs a six pack before his afternoon run?

Answering questions about this kind of risk taking is easy, particularly when it involves situations as obvious as these. But have you ever knowingly worked with someone who was under the influence of any drug or alcohol? Have you ever covered up for someone who has these habits? How often have you ignored an unsafe act and said nothing - especially when it involved drugs or alcohol?

This is a difficult topic to deal with because drug and alcohol use is often considered a personal matter. But when substance abuse comes into the workplace, it’s no longer a private concern!

If you worked with someone who was endangering lives by not following a safety procedure, wouldn’t you bring it up? Failure to correct unsafe practices is a neglect of your safety responsibility and ultimately adds to our incident prevention problem instead of helping us solve it. Most of us wouldn’t hesitate to report an impaired driver on the road. But when it comes to a co-worker or supervisor who’s endangering your life, it’s so difficult.

If you haven’t been exercising your safety responsibility, now is the time to start. If you don’t, sooner or later the price will be paid in incidents, injuries or even lives!

As we all know, substance abuse affects the body and mind’s ability to function properly. A worker under the influence of alcohol or drugs is subject to impaired eyesight, coordination and judgment. The time needed to react to the pressures of the job increases significantly. All of these factors could spell disaster!

Workers who are “high” on the job are potential time-bombs. Due to their clouded judgment, they not only put themselves at risk but also others - including you. The sobering fact is that when unsafe acts are performed and safety rules are ignored, incidents are not only possible but will invariably happen - it’s just a matter of time. Add to that the fact that even a slightly impaired worker will often tend to stray from proper safety procedures due to over confidence, carelessness and simple lack of judgment and you have the potential for disaster!
What can be done?

Many employers have chosen to fight against substance abuse in the workplace. They’ve implemented programs to assist in the treatment of addicted workers and some have even instituted drug testing policies.

There are successful examples of corporate / employee assistance programs that offer private, and most importantly, confidential counseling and referrals to treatment in order to help workers while maintaining their job security. Successful counseling programs such as these have been set up through the efforts of labor groups, industrial councils and company management. And they’re often available to your family members as well.

Don’t ignore unsafe acts! We all have a right to do away with unsafe acts in our workplace - and that includes those that are a result of drug and alcohol abuse! Anyone working under the influence of drugs or alcohol should be reported immediately. This might be one of the hardest things you ever have to do. But it’s far better to find help for this individual now before we end up removing him or another innocent co-worker in an ambulance.