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For employers

## Methamphetamine and the workplace

The effect of illicit drugs, including methamphetamine, can have an impact on workplace health, safety, relationships and productivity.

Methamphetamine use can impact on the workplace in several ways.

- › Some people may use methamphetamine while at work because they feel it improves their ability to work. For example, shift workers, hospitality staff or long haul drivers may use it to help them stay awake and concentrate for long periods of time. In reality, it affects the way a person sees the world and how they react to things which can affect their safety and the safety of others.
- › Some people may use methamphetamine outside of work, but the after effects when they are “coming down” may affect their ability to work.
- › The long term effects of methamphetamine on a person’s health and wellbeing can also affect their ability to work safely and their productivity. For example, people may take sick days to deal with methamphetamine-related health issues.

This fact sheet outlines some of the effects of methamphetamine and how it can impact on the workplace. It also provides a list of further resources that can assist employers to develop an alcohol and other drug policy for their workplace.

### What is methamphetamine?

Amphetamines are a family of drugs that act as stimulants and speed up the activity of the central nervous system (CNS). Methamphetamine is part of this amphetamine family and comes in different forms:

- › A **powder**, sometimes called “speed”, “meth”, “up”, “fast”, “louee”, “goey”, “whiz”, “pep pills” or “uppers”.
- › A crystalline powder, **crystal methamphetamine**, that is sometimes called “ice”, “crystal meth”, “meth”, “glass”, or “shabu”.

- › An **oily paste or powder**, sometimes called “base”, “paste”, “pure” or “wax”.

### What are the effects of methamphetamine?

The stimulant effects of methamphetamine can last from anywhere between 7 and 24 hours, but some of the other unwanted effects, such as “coming down”, can last for several days.

Some of the immediate effects of methamphetamines can include:

- › A speeding up of bodily functions, including an increased heart rate, breathing and blood pressure—this can put extra strain on the heart and body.
- › Feeling excited and a sense of wellbeing.
- › Feeling more energetic, alert, increased concentration.
- › Being talkative, restless, clenching the jaw and grinding the teeth.
- › Increased confidence—this may lead to people taking risks where they can hurt themselves and others.
- › Increased strength and faster reaction times—people may not realise their strength and may accidentally hurt other people.
- › A dry mouth, enlarged pupils, and increased body temperature and sweating.
- › Reduced appetite.
- › Headaches and dizziness.
- › Rapid shifts in the way a person thinks and speaks—this can make a person difficult to understand or behave in a strange way.
- › Anxiety and paranoia—they may even have panic attacks and experience a range of mental health problems.

- › Irritability, hostility and feeling aggressive—they may have mood swings, become argumentative and may get into physical fights.
- › Difficulty sleeping—this can affect a person's mood and makes it difficult to concentrate and stay awake the next day.

Once the initial effects of methamphetamine begin to wear off and the person starts to "come down" they experience a range of other effects including:

- › lethargy, exhaustion and increased sleep
- › reduced appetite
- › mood swings
- › feeling restless, irritable, tense and anxious—some people may even become violent
- › feeling down, even depressed
- › paranoia.

### How can methamphetamine affect the workplace?

**Occupational health and safety (OHS).** Many of the effects listed above can impact on a person's coordination, motor control, concentration and ability to make decisions. This can lead to an increased risk of injury.

**Workplace relationships.** Mood swings, irritability, and erratic and unpredictable behaviour can cause problems between staff and between staff and customers. In extreme cases, arguments could become violent or staff and customers may feel intimidated or threatened by someone affected by drugs. This may then become an OHS issue.

**Productivity.** OHS issues, workplace relationships, employee health, absenteeism, and many other factors all contribute to the productivity of a workplace.

### What can workplaces do?

Drug-related harm in the workplace is a complicated issue and each workplace has its own unique mix of people and issues. This means that there is no one solution that will work for all workplaces. Each workplace will need to tailor their response to methamphetamine and other drugs to suit their particular situation and needs.

There are a range of approaches and strategies that workplaces can use. Some workplaces may use a combination of approaches. Some examples of some of the strategies used by workplaces are listed below.

### Develop a workplace alcohol and other drug policy

A workplace alcohol and other drug policy is a written document that provides guidelines and procedures for addressing alcohol and other drug-related issues in the workplace. Having a policy can help change the workplace culture around methamphetamine and other drug use.

The policy should:

- › be developed in consultation with management and staff and/or their representatives (health and safety representative or union)
- › apply to all staff and management in a way that is ethical, fair and consistent
- › clearly detail what is acceptable behaviour and the consequences of inappropriate behaviour
- › set out clearly the procedures that will be followed if inappropriate alcohol and other drug use is detected or observed
- › be clearly communicated to all members of the workplace
- › be part of the organisation's overall OHS strategy
- › focus on prevention, education, counselling and rehabilitation.

### Develop a workplace drug prevention program

These programs may be part of existing health promotion programs and provide information and education about methamphetamine and other drugs. These programs may be able to prevent people from starting to use these drugs or help people to address drug use before they become dependent.

### Provide access to relevant services

Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs) can provide a confidential counselling and referral service for both employers and employees on a range of issues, including methamphetamine and other drugs.

## More information

For more information on drugs and drug prevention contact the DrugInfo Clearinghouse on tel. 1300 8585 84, email [druginfo@adf.org.au](mailto:druginfo@adf.org.au), or see our website [www.druginfo.adf.org.au](http://www.druginfo.adf.org.au)

## Alcohol and other drug testing

There is much debate surrounding the introduction of alcohol and other drug testing in the workplace. For some industries, for example, where people are operating heavy machinery such as mining and airlines, testing is more commonplace. In many other industries, the issue is not as clear cut.

Before implementing testing into a workplace there are a range of important issues that need to be addressed to establish if testing is a suitable option. For example:

- › Why is it being introduced? Is it to identify employees whose drug use could have safety implications?
- › Would the testing be across the entire workplace or just targeted at those in selected positions/roles?
- › Would the testing occur at random intervals, when someone is suspected of being under the influence of drugs, or only after an incident?
- › What type of testing would be used and how accurate is it? What does a "positive" test actually mean? For example, does it mean that a person is affected by a drug or does it just mean they have traces of a drug in their system that is not impairing their ability?
- › Which drugs will and won't be included in the testing?
- › What about employee privacy issues?
- › What happens if someone gets a "positive" result?

## More information

### *Workplace policies and information*

Below is a list of websites and publications that provide information about alcohol and other drugs in the workplace and guidance around developing a workplace policy.

- › *Alcohol and other drugs in the workplace: a guide to developing a workplace alcohol and other drugs policy* Sydney: WorkCover New South Wales, 2006 ([www.workcover.nsw.gov.au/Publications/OHS/RiskManagement/drugs\\_alcohol\\_workplace.htm](http://www.workcover.nsw.gov.au/Publications/OHS/RiskManagement/drugs_alcohol_workplace.htm))
- › Alcohol and work ([www.alcoholandwork.adf.org.au](http://www.alcoholandwork.adf.org.au))
- › Assessing fitness to drive: for commercial and private vehicle drivers, Sydney: Austroads, 2012 ([www.austroads.com.au/assessing-fitness-to-drive](http://www.austroads.com.au/assessing-fitness-to-drive))

- › Building Trades Group Drug and Alcohol Program ([www.btgda.org.au](http://www.btgda.org.au))
- › *Establishing a policy to manage alcohol and other drugs in the workplace*, Sydney: WorkCover New South Wales ([www.workcover.nsw.gov.au/Publications/OHS/SafetyGuides/establishing\\_policy\\_manage\\_alcohol\\_other\\_drugs\\_workplace.htm](http://www.workcover.nsw.gov.au/Publications/OHS/SafetyGuides/establishing_policy_manage_alcohol_other_drugs_workplace.htm))
- › National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction (NCETA): workplace alcohol and other drug issues ([nceta.flinders.edu.au/workplace](http://nceta.flinders.edu.au/workplace))
- › SafeWork South Australia: Alcohol and other drugs ([www.safework.sa.gov.au/show\\_page.jsp?id=5914](http://www.safework.sa.gov.au/show_page.jsp?id=5914))
- › Smith D *Work-related alcohol and drug use: a fit for work issue*, Canberra: Australian Safety and Compensation Council, 2007 ([www.asc.gov.au/asc/aboutus/publications/researchreports/work-relatedalcoholanddruguse-afitforworkissue.htm](http://www.asc.gov.au/asc/aboutus/publications/researchreports/work-relatedalcoholanddruguse-afitforworkissue.htm))
- › *Stress, bullying, alcohol and other drug misuse—Hidden hazards: a guide for employers*, Hobart: WorkCover Tasmania, 2007 ([www.wst.tas.gov.au/publications/safety/workplace\\_safety](http://www.wst.tas.gov.au/publications/safety/workplace_safety))
- › Western Australia Department of Consumer and Employment Protection: Information on alcohol and drugs in the workplace ([www.docep.wa.gov.au/WorkSafe/Content/Safety\\_Topics/Alcohol\\_and\\_drugs/index.htm](http://www.docep.wa.gov.au/WorkSafe/Content/Safety_Topics/Alcohol_and_drugs/index.htm))
- › WorkSafe Victoria: Alcohol ([www.workcover.vic.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/WorkSafe/Home/Safety+and+Prevention/Health+And+Safety+Topics/Alcohol](http://www.workcover.vic.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/WorkSafe/Home/Safety+and+Prevention/Health+And+Safety+Topics/Alcohol))

### *Alcohol and other drug information*

- › Australian Drug Foundation Bookshop [www.bookshop.adf.org.au](http://www.bookshop.adf.org.au)
- › DrugInfo Clearinghouse [www.druginfo.adf.org.au](http://www.druginfo.adf.org.au) or tel. 1300 85 85 84

### *Counselling, support and referral*

- › Directline tel. 1800 888 236
- › CounsellingOnline [www.counsellingonline.org.au](http://www.counsellingonline.org.au)
- › Family Drug Help, tel. 1300 660 068

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