



# Newsletter

April 2022

**eSource**

## **Drug Use: Impact, Rules, Regulations and Mitigation Practices in the Utility Industry in the U.S**



# ZERO TOLERANCE

FOR ALCOHOL, DRUGS, SMOKING  
AND WEAPONS ON THIS PROPERTY

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Abusing intoxicating substances such as alcohol and drugs in the Public Power industry poses a serious threat to the safety of workers. It is a pervasive problem that often results in fatal accidents and other relevant risks. This paper aimed to investigate the impacts of substance abuse at job sites, the perception of industry professionals about the issue, and the current practices of the industry. The objective was to compare the perception of the industry to the findings of the background study conducted in this area. To achieve this goal, the authors conducted a survey to analyze (1) the difference in perception between onsite and administrative teams regarding the issue of onsite substance abuse, (2) comparing possibilities of occurrence of diverse impacts of substance abuse as per the industry perspective, and (3) effectiveness of the available mitigation practices according to industry professionals. The results show that (1) there is a significant difference in perception regarding the existence and the seriousness of the problem of substance abuse in the utility industry between the onsite and the administrative teams, (2) though fatal accidents are the worst possible impact, loss in productivity is considered as the most common impact, and (3) drug-testing is not considered as the best mitigation practice by industry professionals. It was concluded that there is a need for education on the seriousness of drug abuse as well as extensive research for developing more efficient mitigation systems.

The Utilities industry is one of the most hazardous industries. Electrical work demands focus and teamwork. In such a work environment, it becomes even more important to eliminate the use of intoxicating substances such as illicit drugs and alcohol, not only for the safety of oneself but also for the safety of coworkers. The workers in the utility industry could be exposed to substantial risk due to coworkers indulging in substance abuse, as each employee has to depend on the competence of the entire team to work safely. Substance abuse is common in all industries, but the risks are higher in the Electric industry as workers perform many more life-threatening jobs daily that include working at a height, working with electricity, and moving heavy equipment around the job site. Losing focus even for a split second is enough to cause a fatal accident.

According to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, substance abuse is the inherent reason for 65% of all work-related accidents. Utility workers use intoxicating substances not only for recreation but also to cope with the strenuous nature of work time efficiency.

Workers are often prescribed opioids by healthcare professionals for pain relief. Opioids being an addictive substance can be dangerous. If overused, it can lead to withdrawal symptoms making it difficult to quit.

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Thus, it is essential to address the drug problem to reduce the number of impaired workers on the site. The most common drug other than opioids that is rampantly used in the workplace is marijuana. Currently, recreational marijuana is legal in 12 states and medical marijuana is legal in more than 30 states in the U.S..

Recently, Canada also has legalized marijuana and the Coca-Cola Company has been expanding its business model toward cannabis-infused drinks. With increasing legal weed and intoxicated workers, the utility industry requires preparing for a rapid regulatory change, looking for innovative ways to prevent severe accidents and losses, and seeking out employees who abuse alcohol and drugs.

## **Aims and Objectives**

Many industries have been constantly suffering from the risks of substance abuse, and the number of people involved in substance abuse has been the highest compared to previous years. This shows that despite the constant battle to put a check on this issue, there has been little success. Therefore, there is a need to delve deep into the topic to investigate and identify what could be the possible reasons for the ever-increasing magnitude of this problem. In this regard, this paper aims to investigate the major impacts of substance abuse and the seriousness of the issue, the relevant state and federal laws and regulations for restraining their use, and the current practices followed for mitigating substance abuse in the utility industry. The major objectives of this paper are listed below:

- To explore the relation between job positions and their subsequent understanding of the seriousness and risks of substance abuse at job-sites.
- To analyze and identify the most common impacts of substance abuse as per industry perspective.
- To analyze and compare the efficiency of the three majorly used practices for restraining workplace substance abuse as per the professionals working in the industry.

The study was focused on conducting a two-way investigation. First, through an analysis of relevant research works previously conducted and information gathered in this area, certain hypotheses were formulated. Second, a detailed survey was designed, that aimed to understand the perceptions regarding substance abuse in the industry, including the opinion of the industry professionals and experts on this matter. The goal was to find out whether the industry perceived things differently from what the information obtained from relevant background study suggested and make a preliminary list of possible reasons for such differences. The survey was solely based on the hypotheses that the authors deduced after reviewing similar studies conducted previously, information obtained from the background study, and having face-to-face informal conversations with utility professionals. The two-way investigation would help identify some of the underlying root causes regarding the ever-increasing magnitude of the problem and help understand the actual seriousness of the situation and awareness of the industry as a whole. Identifying the knowledge gaps would help in taking adequate actions in the right direction for improvement.

## **Background**

**Impacts of Substance Abuse** The National Household Survey of Drug Abuse (NHSDA) has shown in recent data that 70% of all current users (used within the last 30 days) of illicit drugs are employed full time . The rate of substance abuse in the industry alone is almost twice the national average . The National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD) states that “15% of industry workers are involved in drug abuse”. The effects of intoxicating substances are more or less the same on all human beings across the world, and therefore would show more or less the same lapses in work.

Previous studies have shown that there is a significant relationship between drug abuse and workplace safety. In a study Frank V. Mushi and Sylvester L. Manegi claimed that being intoxicated at work is not only dangerous for oneself since it leads to “needless risk-taking behavior and ignorance towards safety” but it also adversely affects the quality of work due to reduced attention.

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This, in turn, leads to an increase in the cost of the project due to rework and injuries. The major impacts of substance abuse in the Utility industry may be listed as follows:

- Accidents and injuries leading to deaths.
- Loss of productivity.
- Cost overruns.
- Legal issues.
- Absenteeism.
- Safety.
- Fatal Accidents and Injuries.

### **Current Practices for Drug-Related Training and Testing**

Two major strategies that had been generally employed in the past to address the problem of substance abuse in the workforce were:

(1) employee assistance programs, designed to identify workers with substance abuse problems and provide them with treatment, and (2) drug testing, designed to identify drug-using workers and depending on the program exclude/remove them from the workforce and/or provide them with treatment. Though these strategies helped to detect intoxication to some extent, they were not primarily preventive and did not aim at providing workers with the skills and knowledge to abstain or reduce the use of alcohol and other drugs before it becomes harmful for their health and job performance [9]. In response to the lack of substance abuse prevention approaches in the workplace, several investigators have been developing and testing the effectiveness of preventive interventions designed specifically to provide workers with the skills and knowledge to avoid substance abuse [25]. Based mainly on social-cognitive and health behavior change theories, today these psycho-educational interventions have typically taken the form of group-based classes or seminars presented in the workplace [9]. There is no doubt that Utility work is sometimes strenuous and difficult. But any job, no matter how difficult, can be made easy by a team effort. The utility industry can play a huge role in curbing the use of intoxicated materials in the workplace.

**Policies** A written documentation such as a policy or rule and their implementation always has more impact than verbal advice. Offering benefits including comprehensive coverage for substance abuse disorders including aftercare and counseling, reduce the stigma and provides support for a safe return to work, thereby focusing on promoting workability rather than disability. This can be a useful tool in the prevention of using intoxicating substances especially for addicts who desire to recover from their situation.

**Education** Educating the workers about the effects and consequences of using intoxicating substances is important to prevent its use, which can be achieved by establishing and promoting programs focused on improving health. It is necessary to educate workers on the responsible use of prescriptive drugs including the impact it has on job performance and the possibility for addiction. Some workplace programs also aid for the treatment of addiction issues. Such programs not only provide information about drug abuse to the employers but also assist them with contacts of community-based treatment providers and structures employee assistance programs (EAPs).

**Drug Testing** The most commonly used method for testing the presence of drugs in the human system is a chemical-based test that involves the collection of a biological sample such as hair, urine, sweat, or saliva from the person to be tested. Thus, this procedure is invasive in nature, and more than often employees are reluctant to participate in it. Some tests help to detect immediate use while others help to detect whether the drug had been used during a certain period. Also, different drugs remain in the system for different periods, ranging from few hours to a few weeks, during which they may be detected by a test. Urine test is the most common test that is used in the multiple industries.

## IMEA Workshop Calendar

# 2022

### January

- 12 Supervisory Development Series: Session One (Mishawaka)
- 26 Excavation Competent Person (Lebanon)

### February

- 8 & 9 Supervisor Safety (Lebanon)
- 16 Supervisory Development Series: Session two (Mishawaka)

### March

- 9 - 11 Apprentice Top-Out Exam #031918 (Scottsburg)
- 16 Supervisory Development Series: Session Three (Mishawaka)
- 21 - 25 IMEA 612 Intermediate Workshop #032320 (Scottsburg)

### April

- 4 - 8 IMEA 613 Advanced Workshop #031819 (Scottsburg)
- 12 - 13 Line Clearance Arborist Certification (Frankfort)
- 25 -29 IMEA 611 Basic Workshop #041921 (Scottsburg)

### May

- 2 - 13 IMEA 610 Wood Pole Climbing Workshop #050222 (Scottsburg)
- 24 - 26 IMEA 212 Transformer Theory & Connections (Scottsburg)

### June

- 7 - 8 Working it Hot - Insulate / Isolate (Scottsburg)

### August

- 22 - 9/2 IMEA 610 Wood Pole Climbing Workshop #082222 (Scottsburg)

### September

- 12 - 16 IMEA 613 Advanced Workshop #093019 (Scottsburg)
- 21 - 23 Apprentice Top-Out Exam #100118 (Scottsburg)
- 26 - 30 611 Basic Workshop #092721 (Scottsburg)

### October

- 11 - 13 IMEA Annual Meeting & Vendor Expo (Blue Chip Casino, Michigan City, IN.)
- 25 - 27 IMEA 212 Transformer Theory & Connections (Scottsburg)

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## 2022 IMEA Annual Meeting & Vendor Expo

~ October 11 - 13, 2022 ~

Blue Chip Casino  
Hotel & Event Center  
Michigan City, IN.

Registration Coming in May 2022!

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