

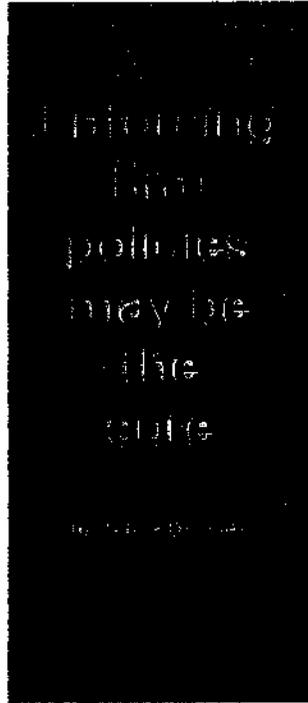
Roofing falls victim to drug abuse epidemic

At one mid-sized roofing company, increased employee absenteeism, decreased productivity and signs of poor workmanship were the first indications that drugs had invaded the workplace.

"I knew we had a problem, but it kept getting worse and worse," said the company's president, an NRCA member who wishes to remain anonymous. "Then we noticed that materials were disappearing. Over the period of a year, more than \$400,000 worth of materials and equipment were lost through mishandling, lack of controls and just plain theft."

The roofing contractor also noticed a marked difference in the morale of his employees. "Some people were afraid to go off on jobs with others, and there was the general feeling that no one cared," he said.

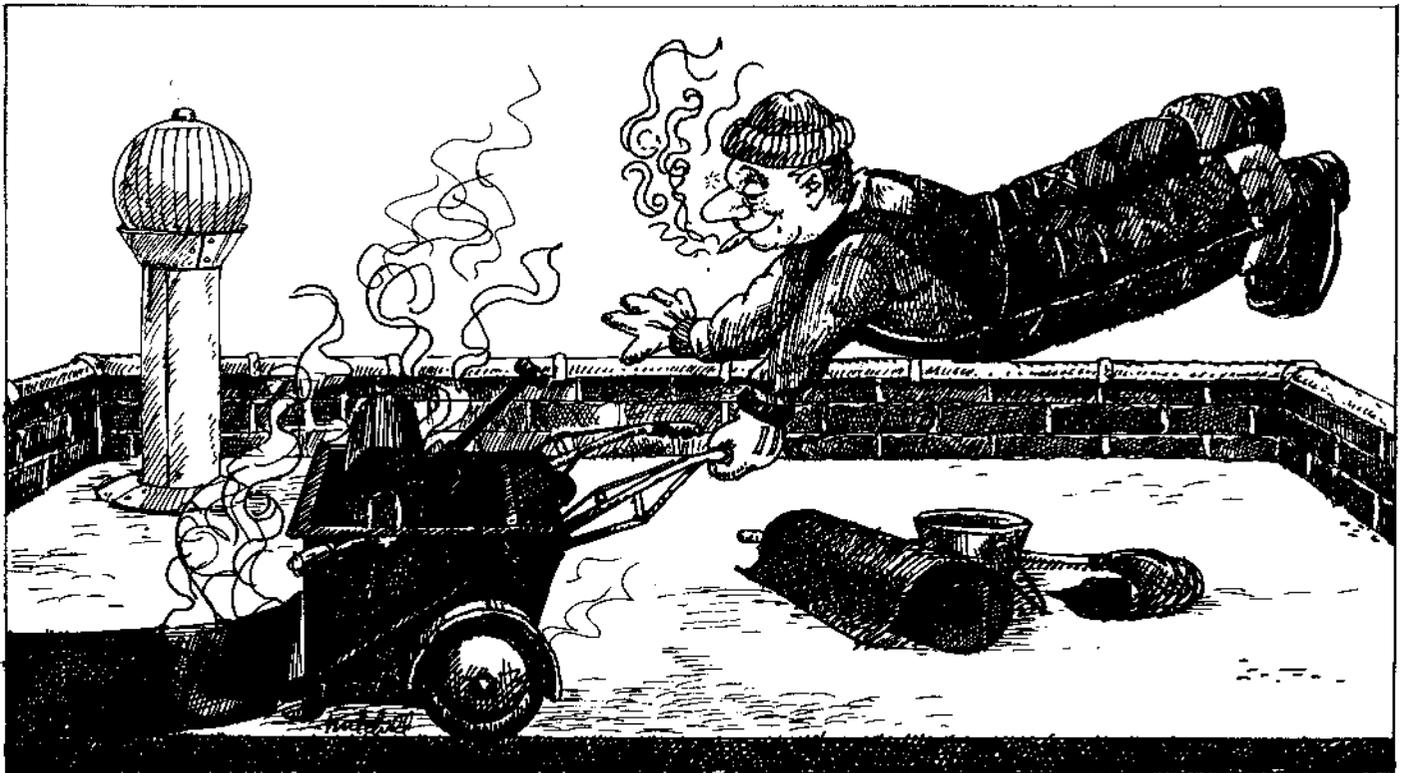
Tricia Drevets is a Chicago-based freelance writer.



This contractor's experience has become all too common in recent years. Employee drug abuse is a cancer that has spread to many other roofing firms as well as other American businesses across the country—both blue collar and white collar.

"We knew we had a drug problem," the contractor continued, "but the extent of it was not apparent until we were notified by the police that some of our employees had been arrested."

In this contractor's case, employees from the supervisory level down were buying, selling and using drugs on company time and at company jobsites. Of 150 employees, about 40 were involved with drugs, primarily PCP, cocaine and marijuana. In order to support their expensive habits, some employees were stealing the company's roofing materials, such as insulation, to sell or to use in their own moonlighting endeavors.



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Faced with a situation that had already hurt his company's reputation in the community and one that could easily put him out of business, the contractor hired legal counsel and drug enforcement specialists to help him attack the problem from the inside.

"We first publicized our concern to the employees and offered assistance to anyone who admitted they had a problem and wanted help," the contractor said. "Then we posted a \$1,000 reward to anyone who gave us information about the pilfered materials and equipment. One response led to the recovery of some of our materials and to the dismissal of several people.

"We hired undercover people to work with our crews and we mentioned the use of polygraph tests, although we never enacted them. Just the threat seemed to be enough for some people."

In the wake of these initial steps, some employees resigned. "I guess we made it too hot for them," the contractor said. "We also fired a few people."

Today, with a detailed drug policy in place, many new employees and stricter supervisory guidelines, this roofing company is in a rebuilding stage, and the president is optimistic about its future.

"The company—what we'd been working to build for so long—was in jeopardy because of drugs," he said. "We have a fresh new spirit now, and we're on the way back. We've definitely helped morale by tightening the overall organization."

A national malady

No one can accurately state how pervasive substance abuse among roofers is, but the industry does seem to reflect national trends. Federal experts estimate that between 10 and 20 percent of all American workers use dangerous drugs on the job. Other studies show that people who take drugs regularly—about 25 percent of the population—are likely to use them on the job or at least be under their influence when they arrive at work.

One study, conducted last year by the 800/COCAINE national telephone hotline for cocaine abusers, found that 75 percent of the callers got high on the job, and 69 percent regularly worked under the drug's influence. One-fourth of the callers said they used coke at work every day.

No age group is immune from the problem of substance abuse, but the choice of highs may be different. Studies have shown that drug abuse is more prevalent among younger workers, while alcohol abuse is more of a problem for older workers.

These guidelines have been specifically designed to help supervisors deal with drug abuse on the worksite. They are reprinted from *Constructor* magazine with permission of the Associated General Contractors of America.

Do

Do make it clear the company is concerned with job performance; unless job performance improves, the job may be in jeopardy. Do point out the availability of programs that help resolve a personal or health problem that may be affecting job performance.

Do explain that the responsibility for accepting assistance rests with the employee.

Do emphasize that the identity of those accepting treatment in a program will remain confidential in the company.

Do bear in mind that addiction, whether to alcohol or drugs, is pro-

gressive. Without treatment it always gets worse, never better. Professional help and treatment are usually necessary. Do keep regular, objective written records. Document!

Do know your employees—become familiar with skills, abilities and normal performance and personality.

Do become familiar with signs and symptoms of drug/alcohol abuse. Learn awareness and recognition.

Do know your company policy and the exact steps the employer wishes to be taken.

Don't

Don't try to diagnose the problem or act as a counselor.

Don't moralize. Restrict comments to job performance, attitude and attendance.

Don't be misled by sympathy-evoking tactics, at which the drug addict or alcoholic has become expert.

Don't cover up for a friend and ignore a developing problem. A misguided kindness can lead to a serious delay in recovery and can literally kill the afflicted employee, as well as co-workers, through accidents or errors of judgment caused by the influence of drugs or alcohol.

Don't discuss the employee's problem with anyone except designated personnel, those in direct line of authority above you, or competent professional authorities involved in treatment programs.

Don't fail to keep good objective records of all employees' performances.

Don't discipline those caught with prohibited substances unequally.

Don't allow unfit employees to operate dangerous machinery or work in areas where they could cause injury or property damage.

Endangered roofers

While substance abuse can affect job performance in any field, it is a particular threat to an industry such as roofing.

"Anybody whose sense of judgment is impaired creates a big problem when you're up on a roof," said Jay Refieuna of Mansfield Roofing, a suburban Chicago company. "One person with a drug problem can affect everybody else up there. I'm concerned about safety."

Rick Rosenow of Hans Rosenow Roofing, another Chicago area contractor, added, "My employees are working in conditions in which one step the wrong way can mean a life. To me, safety is most important, but with drug abuse, we're also dealing with loss of productivity and a bad image for the industry. The roofing industry has never had a particularly high public image, and this problem just hurts it all the more."

Roofing workers, like other workers, with substance abuse problems, can burden a contractor's operation with ruinous productivity and safety problems. Abusers are four times more likely to have accidents and five times more likely to file compensation claims. They are also absent 16 times more often than the average worker.

The problem of substance abuse is all the more insidious because it is often so hard to detect. There are, however, some indications that should alert a contractor to the possibility that drugs are damaging his operation. Contractors should take note of increases in absenteeism, tardiness, accidents, workers' compensation claims, or health and medical costs. Reduced productivity, and damaged, destroyed or missing property are also warning signs. Other red flags are changes in an employee's work habits, such as sloppy work from a competent employee, and poor worker morale.

The no-drug cure

According to Peter Spanos, a partner in the Atlanta law firm of Hendrick, Spanos and Phillips, contractors who suspect employee drug abuse must take decisive action. "First, the company should adopt a firm no-drug policy and enforce it," Spanos said. "Communicate to employees that anyone found using drugs or under the influence of drugs will be fired. Second, have an educational program to show employees how drugs affect safety and productivity. A third step can be actual drug testing."

Drug policies must have clearly defined goals, according to Bruce Wilkinson, president of Workplace Consultants, Inc., a New Orleans-based loss prevention consulting firm. The programs he develops for companies:

- provide a safe and healthful workplace;
- protect property;
- comply with contractual obligations to clients, other contractors and existing laws; and
- ensure quality craftsmanship and protect the company's reputation.

To accomplish these objectives, drug policies must spell out which drugs are prohibited. "Be specific about what they can't have," Wilkinson said. "The most successful policies restrict or regulate out the use of alcohol, drugs and contraband."

The times and places to which these rules apply should also be listed. Wilkinson suggests the company premises as well as jobsites and the time and distance to and from jobsites as places where drug regulations should be enforced.

Finally, employees must be informed of the penalties for breaking these rules. Many policies state that an employee will be terminated if he is found using drugs on the job. If the policy includes the use of drug searches when drug abuse is suspected or when an accident has occurred, it should also state what action will be taken if an employee refuses to submit to a search.

Adherence to a company drug policy can and should be made a condition for employment. The policy should be posted and displayed at prominent locations throughout the worksite. In addition, Wilkinson recommends that a copy of the policy be sent home. "Not only will you go on record of notifying the employee of the policy, but you will also get the support of the spouse this way," he said.

Wilkinson also suggests that companies hold orientation programs to teach employees the positive aspects of the new policy and how it will ensure everyone's safety. At the end of the orientation, employees should be asked to sign a form that acknowledges they are now working under the new policy.

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Detecting the disease

Policies and good intentions may do little good if the drug abuse goes undetected, however. But discovering the abusers among the workforce requires a keen sensitivity to the legal and ethical issues involved. Drug searches and medical tests must be conducted without abusing the worker's rights or breaking the prevailing laws.

A company's search policy should be clearly explained in the drug policy. Unannounced, periodic and non-discriminatory searches of all persons and property on company premises may be conducted by authorized management representatives. Dogs and third party consultant search teams, such as Wilkinson's firm, may be used.

Workers cannot refuse to submit to searches and testing on the grounds that they invade their right of privacy, according to Spanos. "Drug use is illegal," he said. "A private employer is not subject directly to the First or 14th Amendment, so technically there is no right of privacy in this case."

If an employee objects to a search, the management representative should carefully explain company policy. If the employee still refuses, it may be grounds for dismissal.

Under no circumstances should an employee be forced to submit to a search or be detained forcibly.

In some situations, the contractor may want to medically test the employees themselves for the presence of drugs. However, the results of such tests may be uncertain. Urinalysis, the most common means of testing for drugs, can accurately detect the presence of a drug in the body, but it cannot pinpoint when the drug was consumed. For example, a urinalysis on Monday may detect Saturday night's marijuana or cocaine.

According to John Barnhard, the United Union of Roofers, Waterproofers and Allied Workers' health and safety representative, drug testing should be handled on a case-by-case basis. "Urine tests are unreliable," he said. "If someone tests positive, and there is probable cause drugs are involved, he should be given a second test."

Spanos, on the other hand, believes that the question of when the drugs were taken is irrelevant. Employers have the right to fire workers for using drugs even if they weren't under their influence on the job, he argues. "There's no law that employers have to employ or hire someone whose lifestyle they don't like," he said.

Wilkinson suggests that after an employee tests positive for drugs on two occasions, he be suspended for a week while he obtains professional help and counseling paid for by the employer. "After seven days, the employee must prove he has seen a clinician, pass a pre-entrance drug screening and sign a conditional drug statement that says he will be routinely tested for drugs and fired if there is a further problem.

"Now you've given the employee free help and given him a second chance," Wilkinson explained. "If he still feels drugs are more important than the job, I feel the employee has resigned."

Some of the problems associated with drug testing and searches may be avoided if drug abuse problems can be detected through careful observation of the workforce. According to George S. Moeller Jr., president of A.J. Shirk Roofing Co. in Kansas City, Mo., each contractor must be cognizant of any changes in the crew or its work. "We have a small company. With a crew of about 25 to 30 men, it is relatively easy for us to watch them daily. We try to spot a problem before they go to a jobsite. If employees report directly to a jobsite, we have a supervisor there to check the crew."

On the road to recovery

Some drug programs go beyond the detection of drugs and enforcement of the rules. They also help employees overcome substance abuse problems through employee assistance programs (EAP).

"Our company spends a lot of time and energy on the employees we train," said Rich Bolan of Quality Roofing in Passaic, N.J. "With employee assistance we recoup our investment. We also feel a certain obligation to our employees to help them get through this."

An EAP might include care by a company-recommended health facility in the community or a substance abuse self-help organization. The roofing contractor should pick up the costs of this service, Wilkinson said. "We spend millions of dollars on equipment every year but none on people. Yet employers always says it's the employees that are their most valuable asset."

Some contractors, such as Jay Refieuna, refer workers who admit they have a problem to the Union's EAP, which has been in place since 1982. The Union's program puts Union locals and individuals in touch with community service representatives throughout the country. "Our program is affiliated with the AFL-CIO community service department and the United Way," explained Barnhard. "These representatives have been trained to know the resources in their area. They can help workers with any drug- or alcohol-related problems."

NRCA joins the fight

In the past, NRCA has offered help to contractors with employee drug and alcohol abuse problems. A program for members was proposed by the Health Operating Committee in 1982. Former Los Angeles pitcher Don Newcombe presented an outline of the program at the Annual Convention that February, but it never got off the ground.

Moeller, who chaired the Health Operating Committee in 1982, explained, "Quite frankly, the program didn't work because of apathy. It was a matter of contractors not wanting to become too involved with the individual employee."

But, according to Carl Good, NRCA staff liaison for the Health and Safety Committee, the widely publicized incidents of drug abuse in the sports world and an increased concern for jobsite safety have renewed contractors' interest in drug abuse programming.

"Right now we're not sure how big a problem we're talking about in our industry," Good said. "But because drug abuse has become so widely publicized in general, you almost have to take a look at your company and think, 'Maybe I have a problem with my crew.'"

Good mentioned the increased losses and the resulting rise in insurance premiums that contractors have experienced recently as another incentive. "Companies now are saying they can't survive these kinds of losses, so they're more carefully looking into the causes," he said.

"What we're trying to do this year is address the problem of drug and alcohol abuse in terms of health and safety," Good added.

The Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC) is another construction-related organization that is offering help to contractors. ABC is selling its 60-page manual *Drug Abuse and the Workplace* to both members and non-members. "The manual includes everything from detecting the problem, to setting up an in-house drug testing program," said Vicki Tanner, ABC director of communications.

A final word of caution

While quick and decisive action is important to combat drug abuse, it is best to consult a lawyer before implementing a drug policy. In a union shop, the union representative should also be involved in the preparation of the policy and its procedures.

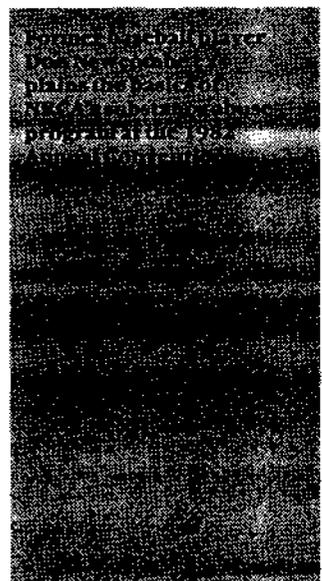


"Drug abuse in the workplace is a developing area," Spanos said. "There may be state laws enacted soon on what management can and cannot do. Keep up on that and be vigilant on what your employees are doing."

With good legal help and the employee's cooperation, a contractor should be able to develop a drug abuse policy that will be well worth the trouble. A clear drug policy will send a signal to employees and to the community that the company is concerned about safety and job performance.

"We see having a drug policy as something that has come of age," concluded Refieuna. "It's a way of dealing with a problem that's affecting all of us."

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