

Recognizing Workplace Impairment Before an Incident Occurs

Building a Defensible, Safety-Driven Response Framework

White Paper for Safety Leaders, HR Professionals, and Operations Managers

Executive Summary

Workplace impairment is one of the most difficult safety challenges organizations face today. As highlighted in Dave Johnson's ISHN article, "How to Tell When a Co-Worker is Impaired? A Safety Pro's Challenge," supervisors are often responsible for recognizing behavioral changes, documenting concerns objectively, and mitigating risk without making assumptions about the underlying cause.

Whether impairment stems from fatigue, mental health concerns, prescription medications, alcohol, cannabis, illicit substances, or personal stressors, the result can be increased safety risks, reduced productivity, and organizational liability. Advanced Training Products (ATP) helps organizations address these challenges through workplace impairment training, objective assessment tools, and compliance-focused documentation systems.

The Growing Challenge of Workplace Impairment

The ISHN article presents a realistic workplace scenario in which an employee exhibits subtle behavioral changes that raise safety concerns. The article emphasizes a critical principle: employers should focus on observable behaviors rather than attempting to diagnose the cause of impairment (Johnson, 2026).

Potential sources of impairment include alcohol, cannabis, prescription medications, fatigue, stress, medical conditions, and mental health challenges. Regardless of cause, employers have a responsibility to identify and address behaviors that may create workplace risk.

Why Traditional Approaches Fall Short

Many organizations rely on subjective judgments, inconsistent documentation, or drug testing alone. Supervisors may hesitate to intervene due to concerns about privacy, discrimination, or making an incorrect assessment.

As Johnson (2026) notes, observable workplace behaviors should drive intervention decisions. Organizations need consistent processes that emphasize objective observations rather than assumptions.

The Importance of Objective Observation

One of the strongest themes in the ISHN article is the importance of objective documentation. Effective records describe what was observed rather than what is suspected. Examples include unsafe equipment operation, reduced coordination, near misses, or significant behavioral changes.

Objective observation improves consistency, supports defensible decision-making, and helps organizations respond appropriately while respecting employee rights (Johnson, 2026).

The Business Impact of Unaddressed Impairment

Failure to recognize and respond to impairment can contribute to workplace injuries, productivity losses, increased workers' compensation costs, legal exposure, and damage to organizational culture. Employees may lose confidence in leadership when unsafe behaviors are repeatedly observed without intervention.

A proactive impairment recognition program helps organizations reduce risk before incidents occur.

Creating a Defensible Impairment Recognition Program

Effective workplace impairment programs typically include:

- Clear policies and procedures
- Supervisor training
- Standardized observation and documentation practices
- Employee education and awareness
- Ongoing compliance and reporting support

These elements help ensure consistent responses to impairment concerns across departments and locations.

How Advanced Training Products Helps Organizations Manage Workplace Impairment

Advanced Training Products (ATP) provides organizations with a comprehensive framework for workplace impairment recognition, assessment, documentation, and compliance.

WIRE Certified Training™ equips supervisors and safety professionals with the skills needed to recognize observable indicators of impairment, conduct objective assessments, document behaviors consistently, and reduce organizational risk (Advanced Training Products, 2024).

WAIT (Workplace Awareness Impairment Training) helps employees understand impairment-related risks and contribute to a culture of accountability and safety.

The WIRED Algorithm™ provides a structured approach to observation, assessment, documentation, and decision support, helping organizations reduce subjectivity and improve consistency.

ATP's reporting and compliance solutions further support incident documentation, audit readiness, policy compliance, and risk management efforts.

Conclusion

The ISHN article demonstrates why early recognition, objective observation, and timely intervention are essential components of workplace safety. Organizations that rely solely on intuition or inconsistent processes leave themselves vulnerable to incidents and liability.

By implementing structured impairment recognition programs and leveraging ATP's training and documentation solutions, organizations can strengthen safety culture, improve compliance, and create a proactive approach to workplace risk management.

Contact us today at Solutions@AdvancedTrainingProducts.com with any questions about WIRE Certified Training™ or visit our website: <http://www.AdvancedTrainingProducts.com/> to get started!

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References

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