

CALIFORNIA STATE PERSONNEL BOARD

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MEMO TO: ALL STATE AGENCIES AND EMPLOYEE ORGANIZATIONS

SUBJECT: Alcohol Abuse in State Service.

It has been documented that the largest drug problem for workers and employers in the United States is the widespread overuse of alcohol

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) (7/31/89), there were 106 million alcohol users in the United States in 1988. Of persons age 14 or older, 2.2 million currently experience problems as a result of alcohol use. Some of the "problem" symptoms include loss of memory, inability to stop drinking before intoxication, inability to cut down drinking, binges, and withdrawal symptoms. The National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) defines "alcoholics" as "those who experience social or personal consequences of alcohol use" (such as arrests, accidents, health problems, difficulties in personal relationships, and impairment of job performance).

It is estimated that about 20% of all adverse actions in the California State civil service involve the abuse of alcohol.

According to Dr. Stephen Weyers, State Medical Officer, the medical profession views alcoholism as a treatable disease. Dr. Weyers states that to be successful in treatment, the alcoholic must first acknowledge the condition and then develop the coping skills and support system necessary to avoid further alcohol use. Treatment programs often involve inpatient treatment (residential treatment programs) or intensive outpatient therapy. To be successful, treatment requires aftercare, with support and counseling on a continuous basis. In spite of treatment, a significant number of alcoholics relapse to alcohol abuse. The goal of treatment should be to decrease relapse and lengthen the period of time between episodes, to assist the employee in returning to successful employment.

When an employee's ability to perform is deteriorating and alcoholism is a suspected causative factor, consideration should be given to medical evaluation and treatment. Depending upon the
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circumstances in individual cases, it may be appropriate to seek medical termination of employees who are medically determined to be unable to perform the work of their class or any other class in the agency due to alcoholism. The advantages of medical termination over adverse action in dealing with this type of situation are that medical termination:

1. recognizes the potential for rehabilitation,
2. allows for reinstatement of an experienced employee after recovery, and
3. is more consistent with treatment of alcoholism as a disease.

Although this memo is intended to alert departments to the medical termination provisions, we recognize that there are situations where an employee's behavior warrants adverse action including dismissal, and that course of action should be pursued, regardless of whether alcoholism is implicated.

Pertinent information regarding medical termination may be found in Section 420 (Actions Based Upon Employee's Medical Condition and Return Rights) of the Personnel Management Policy and Procedures Manual. Questions regarding this manual section should be addressed to the appropriate departmental analyst in the Board's Affirmative Action and Merit Oversight Division.

/s/
DUANE MORFORD, Chief
Policy Division
(916) 445-8241
TDD (916) 323-7490