



# HIGH-LIGHT



## ALCOHOL AND DRUG NEWS BRIEF FOR EMPLOYERS

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### Tik - An Employers Guide

#### Incidence

Successive SACENDU reports clearly illustrate the growing popularity of Tik in Cape Town. During the first half of 2003, only 2% of patients in Western Cape Treatment Centres indicated Methamphetamine as primary substance of abuse – during the latter half of 2005, this figure had risen to 35 %. In that year Methamphetamine also topped alcohol from the first place as the most frequently cited primary substance of abuse by patients in WC treatment centres.



#### What is Tik ?

"TIK" is the slang name given to the stimulant drug, Methamphetamine. TIK usually appears as a white or semi-transparent, odorless, bitter-tasting crystals or powder which may have slight colour variations, depending on the chemicals used in it's manufacture. It is often sold in cooldrink straws.

#### What to look for...

##### in the employee \*

- **Hyperactivity** : Bursts of energy, repetitive, jerky movements, compulsively cleaning, sorting things , touching, rubbing, grooming himself.
- **Speech** : Rapid, incoherent, high pitched quivering voice.
- **Mood** : Unpredictable mood changes, irritable, aggressive, and argumentative, tiredness, depression.
- **Vision** : Dilated pupils, darting, staring eyes.
- **Physical features** : Poor hygiene, weight loss, personal neglect, bad breath, dry mouth, dental problems, oral sores, tremors
- **General** : Medical examination may reveal increased platelet aggregation, oedema, hypertension, arrhythmia, stomach upsets, kidney or liver failure.



Sores caused by Tik user compulsively rubbing his wrists together

**PLEASE NOTE** : These symptoms may vary depending on whether the employee is acutely intoxicated ( generally stimulated) or withdrawing ( generally tired/depressed)



Scarring caused by Tik sores

#### on the shopfloor :

- Discarded, blackened foil paper or lightbulbs minus the metal fitting,
- Bulbs being removed from buildings, vehicles
- Compulsive, senseless behaviour, eg, repeatedly cleaning work areas, disassemble or sort objects.
- Theft of small valuables
- Short lengths of cooldrink straws in toilets, factory floor or locker rooms
- Emotional trauma/high absenteeism rate among female employees ( mothers of Tik users ).

#### Which types of occupations/ types of jobs are particularly at risk ?

Meth use occurs in any type of occupation. Research have however shown that work settings or occupations which features long working hours with prolonged peak mental alertness and concentration, physical performance and/or social skills may be particularly at risk. Examples of such occupations and work settings may include :





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- Long distance driving.
- Working on off shore rigs
- Call centre attendants
- Employees in the hospitality industry ( waiters, restaurant managers)
- Performing arts
- Shift workers

Tik is a stimulant drug. In low oral doses, methamphetamine may actually improve work performance( albeit temporarily) by improving attention, vigilance and motor performance. The direct and indirect effects of recreational doses are however quite debilitating :

**The intoxication phase :** Overseas studies have shown that meth users who are acutely intoxicated thrive on thrill seeking activities such as speeding or engaging in other risky substantially increasing the risk of injury or damage to company property.



**The "post intoxication" phase** marks a period of intense fatigue, poor concentration, hand tremor, depression anxiety and "microsleeps" which is hardly conducive to a safe working environment. In this condition, the Tik user is more easily distracted, irritable, tired and lacking in mental focus. Such an employee is also more likely to become aggressive or rude with co-workers, customers or service providers.

### **Tik Dependency**

High absenteeism rates are frequently reported by employers who experience Tik use amongst their employees. Companies who employ large number of female employees also report high absenteeism rates due to Tik use by family members.

Theft Tik users constant demand for the drug prompts them to resort to theft – these goods are often bartered for Tik onsite.

### **Take Charge !**

**If you can't prevent it, manage it :**

- **Consult :** Discuss the problem with your union ( or workers committee) Get their

suggestions and backing for an organized initiative.

- **Draft and circulate a company policy/position paper on the problem.** If you do not have an explicit substance abuse policy, a simple, clear one page document shall suffice for now. Motivate your initiative : \_Why is the company concerned about the problem ? What evidence do you have that Tik is being used/sold on company premises ? Why is it bad for the company ? What are you planning to do about this ? ( see below).
- **Awareness and information** Employees should be informed about the health and safety hazards of Tik, where to find assistance and the company's stance regarding discipline and assistance. Reinforce this through posters, circulars and exhibitions.
- **Test** Testing for reasonable suspicion is fine but random testing without individual consent is a contravention of the provisos of the Employment Equity Act. Obtain professional guidance in this respect.
- **Train** your Supervisors and management on early identification and how to manage suspected intoxication and dependency.
- **Assessment and Counselling** Get a professional service provider which could screen, assess, counsel, refer ( where needed) Tik abusers and advise you on the most cost effective treatment options.
- **Inhouse support** Most Tik users will relapse. Consider conducting an in-house support group for parents of Tik users or recovering Tik addicts.

Tolerating, turning a blind eye and reactive management by "making examples of individuals" on an ad hoc basis will cost you. Once a drugging subculture has been established in your company you may be forced to resort to drastic, costly and borderline legal measures to resolve the problem.

**For more information on any of the abovementioned strategies, contact :**

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