



safety focus

Medications at Work

This topic is presented to remind employees to use medications responsibly. With so much focus these days on the fight against illegal drugs, you might not realize that when it comes to job-related injuries and deaths, illegal drugs are not the problem; prescription and over-the-counter medications are.

Certainly, illegal drugs are a hazard, but the medicines we receive from doctors and pharmacies are so easily obtained—and so easily misused— that they contribute to more deaths and injuries on the job than the higher-profile illegal drugs.

You should always read the warnings and instructions provided with any medication you are taking. This can be on labels or in package inserts. You need to know how much to take and what the possible side effects may be. These may include dizziness or drowsiness.

If you are taking medication, things to consider include:

- If you are taking the medicine for a painful condition, your condition or the medication may limit your mobility and/or delay your responses.
- If you have a fever, you should not operate or use hazardous machinery.
- If you are having trouble sleeping, you are more likely to end up fatigued at work. Sleep medications and stimulants (including coffee) can mask symptoms of fatigue.
- Many people are susceptible to the amount of antihistamine in cold pills. The side effects include lowered alertness and slowed responses. If you exceed the maximum recommended dose, of course, the effects will be worse.
- The hazardous effects of antihistamines, tranquilizers, mild sedatives and pain relievers are greatly magnified when combined with alcohol.
- The side effects of medications may be worse when taken to relieve a physically stressful illness like the flu.
- Avoid medication if you have to drive vehicles or use power tools, unless approved by your doctor. Be sure that your doctor knows what you do at work.
- Don't refill prescriptions without checking with your doctor, and never take someone else's prescription medication.

If you have an illness that could keep you from working, play it safe and don't try to treat it yourself; see your doctor. **It is better to miss work, or handle other duties for the day, than to risk injury to yourself or a co-worker.**

