

Guidance on dry roles

Alcohol, even in small amounts insufficient to cause obvious intoxication, can impair physical co-ordination and reflexes. It can also adversely affect concentration and alertness. A person under the influence of alcohol is at greater risk of an accident, risking harm to themselves and others.

Heads of Department should identify jobs or tasks where there is potential for serious injury or significant damage to property or equipment in the event of an accident and designate these as 'dry roles'. Jobs which requires sustained vigilance or careful attention and where inattention could result in significant loss or harm to others should also be considered for designation

Staff in these jobs should be instructed that they must not drink alcohol when at work, including during lunch-breaks or to report for work when they may have a blood alcohol level exceeding the UK limit for safe driving – outlined below. Staff in designated dry roles may need to be advised that heavy drinking after work may mean they could be unfit for work on the following day.

Alcohol should not be served at social events held during the working day for staff in dry roles, or an event at which alcohol is to be available organised in such a way that staff in dry roles are not expected to return to normal duties after the event.

Jobs which should be considered for designation as a dry role include those involving:

- ◆ work in a laboratory where hazardous materials including chemicals, radio-isotopes or biological agents are handled
- ◆ operating dangerous machinery, e.g. workshop machinery, food processing equipment, hand tools, cutting equipment.
- ◆ Jobs involving work at height, or where an unimpaired sense of balance is essential e.g. working on roof, scaffold or ladders
- ◆ Electrical maintenance
- ◆ Driving vehicles of any description
- ◆ Clinical duties or contact with patients
- ◆ Security work

This is not an exclusive list. As a general rule, jobs with responsibilities that involve use of, or exposure to, hazards sufficient to require a documented risk assessment should be considered for designation, at least for that aspect of the role.

How to determine UK legal limit for driving

The legal limit for driving in the UK is 80mg alcohol/100ml blood. Most men will exceed this figure if they drink more than 4 units (1 ½ pints beer; 300ml wine). Women can reach the limit after drinking only 3 units.

Alcohol is metabolised and excreted at approximately 1 unit per hour. Someone drinking more than 12-15 units of alcohol e.g. 1½ bottles wine, or 6 pints of lager in the late evening may still have an alcohol level exceeding the limit at which it is illegal to drive on the following morning.

First published by OH Service: May 2010

Reviewed: Nov 2010