

Substance Abuse

As any experienced miner knows, any mine site can be dangerous when safety rules, regulations and precautions are not followed. In cases dealing with substance abuse, the most dangerous situation to miners and their co-workers is not only the mine, it is themselves or the substance abuser working next to them. A former coal mine manager, Mike Hancher, now of the U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration, shares his story regarding substance abuse. Perhaps you will be able to relate to it in some way:

"On a cold January night, I received a rather unusual call from the mine.

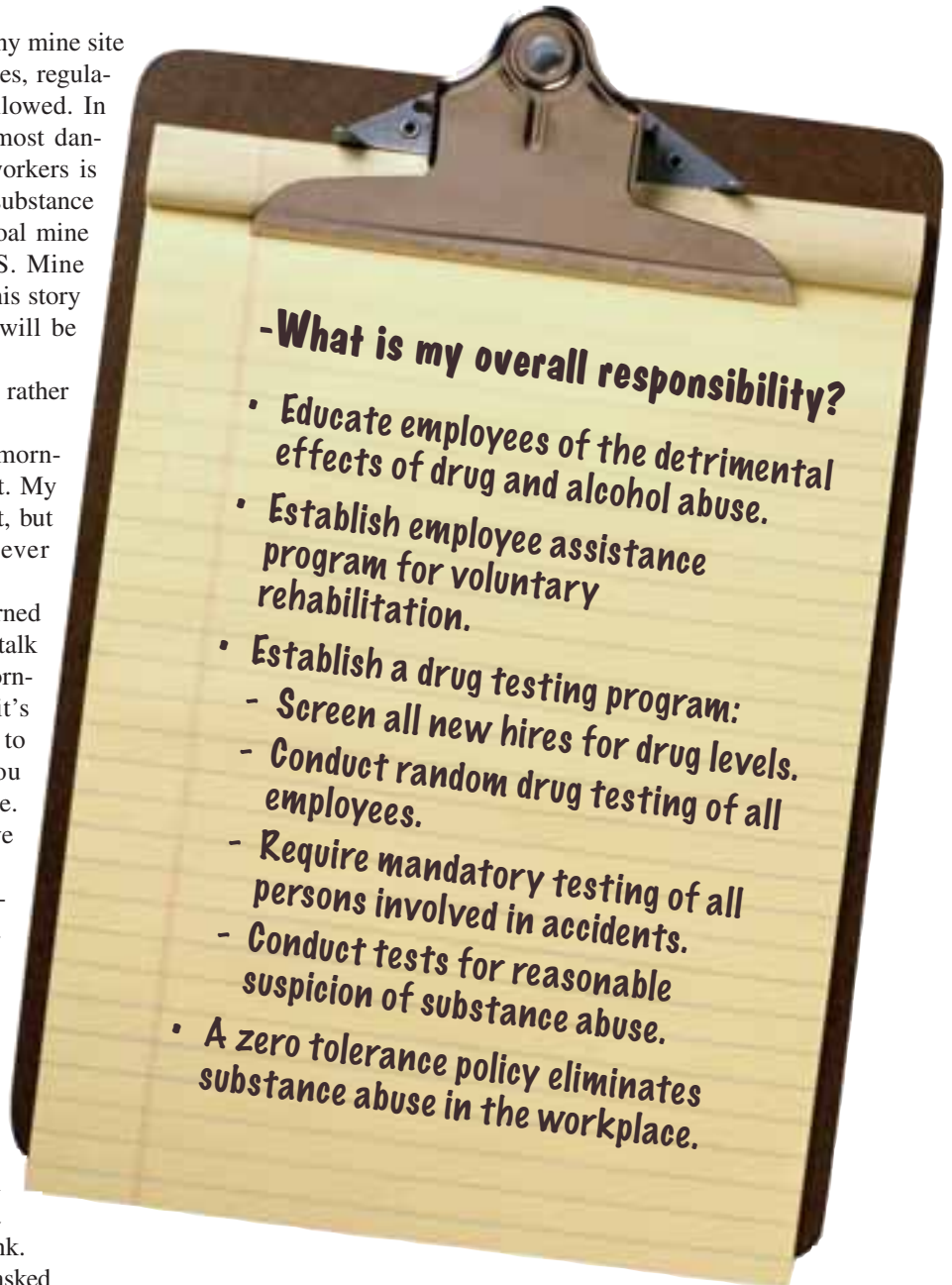
When his phone rings at 2:30 in the morning, a mine superintendent fears the worst. My heart started pounding when I answered it, but this call was different than any I had ever received before.

A miner (let's call him Ralph), had returned to the mine after his shift and wanted to talk privately with me. 'Can't it wait until morning,' I mumbled, still half asleep. 'No, it's important,' he said. 'I walked five miles to get here and I really need to talk to you now.' I detected real urgency in his voice. Reluctantly, I crawled out of bed and drove 25 miles in the snow to meet him.

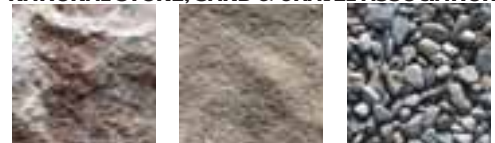
I must admit that I was a bit apprehensive as I entered the parking lot gate. What did this guy need to talk about that was so pressing? What was so important that it couldn't wait until normal business hours?

My questions were answered when I opened the door to the mine office and took one look at Ralph. He had been drinking at a local tavern all evening and was quite intoxicated. He reminded me a bit of Otis, Mayberry's infamous town drunk.

Trying to make sense of the moment, I asked myself, 'Why would anyone walk five miles on a night of sub-zero temperatures just to talk?' As it turned out, Ralph didn't just want to talk



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shop. The day before, he had attended an eight-hour refresher training course and wanted to discuss one of the topics—but not first aid, roof control, ventilation or firefighting. This was personal, and deadly serious. ‘Please help me!’ he cried out.

Ralph was referring to a short discussion he had heard regarding the mine’s Employee Assistance Program. Mine management had decided to inject this discussion into our annual refresher training to make employees aware of the help that was at their disposal. Ralph admitted that he was an alcoholic, knew it was unsafe to be in this condition at work, and wanted to do something about it.

After a few hours of coffee and conversation, I gave Ralph a ride home. He eventually sought professional help and entered a rehabilitation program. Job changes and miles have separated us, but I still often wonder what happened to Ralph. Was he able to attain an alcohol-free lifestyle?

There may be other miners working today who are struggling with drugs or alcohol just like Ralph did. They might not be willing to walk five miles in the snow just to talk, but they want help just the same. My hope is that they seek the assistance that is available to them to become clean and sober. Miners’ families and co-workers deserve nothing less.”

Sources for Help

There are several sources of help from co-workers, family and friends who may have a substance abuse problem.

Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) are generally the best place to direct co-workers experiencing personal problems, including alcohol and drug abuse. Note that EAPs are legally bound to maintain confidentiality and may not divulge information discussed with an employee without written permission from the employee.

If there is no EAP at your company, other resources include:

Substance Abuse Treatment Locator

www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov

Phone: (800) 662-HELP

This Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Web site and toll-free phone line help individuals locate drug and alcohol abuse treatment programs in their communities.

AlcoholScreening.org

www.alcoholscreening.org

This free, confidential Web site lets individuals privately assess their own drinking habits and receive personalized feedback to help them determine if they need help to change those habits. Individuals can also find out about facilities in their communities that offer drug and alcohol abuse treatment and consultations with qualified health professionals regarding alcohol problems.

Al-Anon/Alateen

Phone: (888) 4AL-ANON

www.al-anon.alateen.org

Al-Anon provides information on the effects of alcohol abuse and refers friends and families of alcohol abusers to

nearby support groups. Al-Anon’s purpose is to help families and friends of alcoholics recover from the effects of living with the problem drinking of a relative or friend. Alateen is the organization’s program for young people whose lives have been affected by someone else’s drinking.

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)

www.aa.org

AA offers a way to stop drinking to individuals who feel they have a problem with alcohol. AA groups are located in most cities and rural communities throughout the country. Look up “Alcoholics Anonymous” in a local telephone directory for a contact in your area.

American Council on Alcoholism

Phone: (800) 527-5344

www.aca-usa.org

American Council on Alcoholism provides referrals to alcoholism treatment programs nationwide and distributes written materials on alcohol abuse problems.

Cocaine Anonymous

Phone: (800) 347-8998

www.ca.org

Cocaine Anonymous provides support for people dependent on cocaine and other mind-altering substances. Callers are referred to local help lines.

Nar-Anon

Phone: (800) 477-6291

www.nar-anon.org

Nar-Anon is a worldwide program that provides support for friends and families of individuals with addiction or drug problems.

Focus on Recovery Help Line

Phone: (800) 234-0420

www.focushealthcare.com

Focus on Recovery is a help line which provides support and information for recovering drug addicts through referral to local help lines staffed by other recovering addicts.

National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence Hope Line

Phone: (800) NCA-CALL

www.ncadd.org

This organization, a planning and oversight agency for public substance abuse treatment programs, provides written information on alcohol and drug abuse and referrals to treatment and counseling services nationwide.

This product was developed as part of the MSHA Alliance Program. It does not necessarily reflect the official views of MSHA. Use of the Alliance Program logo is reserved for MSHA and its active Alliance partners. The MSHA Alliance Program is designed to promote miner safety and health through voluntary partnerships, which provide training and education, outreach, technical assistance and a national dialog on mine safety and health. For more information, contact MSHA, www.msha.gov/alliances/alliances.htm. ■