



WORKPLACE SAFETY – RED ALERT ON GAMBLING ADDICTION

June is the annual observance of National Safety Month, which focuses on helping to “keep one another safe from the workplace, or anyplace” [1]. Today, changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in millions of Americans working remotely from their homes.

While casinos in Florida shut down during the pandemic, online gambling soared across the globe and there doesn't appear to be any signs of slowing. While remote gambling is still not lawful in the Sunshine State, the social isolation associated with the pandemic and the increased availability and accessibility of online gambling, resulted in many residents turning to illegal gambling sites to fill the void in their lives. As a result, the role of gambling is now playing a larger role in the workplace than ever before and it is imperative that safeguards, as well as supports, be established to help those who fall prey to gambling disorder or become subject to the adverse impacts (e.g., coworkers, family members, and others).

Safety concerns exist and precautions must be established in every work setting, whether it be at an office, a home worksite, a job site or elsewhere, to assure that necessary protections are in place for all workers. **Though employers typically take various risks into consideration, such as environmental hazards, unsafe working conditions or processes, drug and alcohol abuse, and workplace violence, they rarely include provisions for a silent addiction that is difficult to detect – gambling disorder.**

An addiction to gambling presents havoc in a gambler's life, at home, in the workplace, and elsewhere. Theft, embezzlement, low productivity, security risks, and workplace disruption are all outcomes of compulsive gambling, which leave businesses vulnerable. The disorder can also result in job injuries due to exhaustion, an inability to concentrate, and other serious difficulties commonly experienced by compulsive gamblers.

The Florida Council on Compulsive Gambling provides services and supports to Florida employers and their personnel. Contacts to its 24/7 confidential and multilingual **888-ADMIT-IT** HelpLine can provide comprehensive assistance to gamblers, loved ones, and others, based upon individual circumstances. **In addition to professional treatment, self-help programs, and a breadth of resources and referrals, 888-ADMIT-IT offers an Online Program for Problem Gamblers and a Peer Connect Program, in addition to assistance for employers to establish workplace safeguards and supports.**

At the same time, it is imperative to raise awareness within the workplace about gambling addiction among management, personnel, and Employee Assistance Professionals (EAP). Some quick tips for employers to determine if problem gambling is present in the workplace include the following signs:

- Declining productivity
- Requests to work overtime (i.e., in need of money)
- Vacation days are taken in isolation vs. a week or two
- Use of telephone and computer to gamble or non-related work
- Requests for travel/other advances
- Employee complaints about loans to co-workers or office pools
- Missing money, equipment, or other items
- Preoccupation with sport pools or gambling
- Missing deadlines

Refer staff to an EAP when they are displaying mood swings, repeated absences (without medical notes), and/or instances when they are failing to be at their workstation or responding to requests in a timely manner.

