

870 Employee Assistance Program

871 Introduction

871.1 Purpose

871.11 General

The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a formal, nondisciplinary program designed to assist employees and their immediate families in recovering from alcoholism and drug abuse and in dealing with other problems — mental, emotional, familial, marital, financial, legal, and other — that may adversely affect both an employee's job performance and personal life. Assistance is provided through consultation, evaluation, counseling, and/or referral to community resources and treatment facilities.

871.12 Alcohol or Drug Abuse

Recognizing that alcohol and drug abuse are serious health problems that can adversely affect an employee's job performance and personal life, the EAP continues the Postal Service's obligation under the various collective-bargaining agreements to provide a program for employees afflicted with these problems. The program is not intended to alter or amend any of the rights or responsibilities of postal employees or of the Postal Service itself.

871.2 Definitions

Special terms used in this subchapter include the following:

- a. *Alcoholism* — a complex disease characterized by the uncontrolled use of alcohol.
- b. *Drug abuse* — an improper or illegal use of or dependency on drugs.
- c. *Employee and workplace intervention analyst (EWIA)* — a postal employee with at least a master's degree in psychology, counseling, or other discipline related to human behavior. (See Occupation Code 0301-5363 for a complete description of duties and responsibilities.)
- d. *External EAP service provider* — an individual or group external to the Postal Service providing EAP services through an interagency agreement or on a contractual basis.
- e. *Family member* — any legal dependent of the employee, or anyone living in the employee's household, with the exception of tenants or employees of the postal employee who live in the household.
- f. *Internal EAP* — employee assistance services provided by employees of the Postal Service.
- g. *Other problems* — include, but are not limited to, gambling, stress, and emotional, family, marital, financial, and legal problems.
- h. *Self-initiated referral* — an employee's voluntary referral of him- or herself for assistance from the EAP, made by directly contacting an

EAP counselor. An employee's first visit to the EAP may be on the clock, provided the manager receives advance notice and concurs. Subsequent consultations are on the employee's own time.

- i. *Written referral* — a manager's and/or supervisor's referral of an employee to the EAP based on job performance, attendance, or conduct issues. This type of referral is in writing, and the counselor receives a referral memo addressed to the EAP.

871.3 **Policy**

871.31 **Job Security**

Participation in the EAP is voluntary and will not jeopardize the employee's job security or promotional opportunities.

871.32 **Limits to Protection**

Although the employee's voluntary participation in EAP counseling for alcoholism or drug abuse should be given favorable consideration in disciplinary action, participation in EAP does not limit management's right to proceed with any contemplated disciplinary action for failure to meet acceptable standards of work performance, attendance, and/or conduct. Further, participation in EAP does not shield an employee from discipline or from prosecution for criminal activities.

871.33 **Confidentiality**

Inquiries regarding participation in EAP counseling are confidential, pursuant to the provisions of ELM 874.4.

871.34 **Reasonable Access**

The contractor must endeavor to provide confidential counseling facilities within a reasonable driving distance from the employee's work site or home. While it is desirable to provide ready accessibility to face-to-face EAP counseling, areas exist where it is not possible to do so. Counselors may offer telephone counseling or request that the client travel to the counselor's office. Counselors must be on duty at the EAP office during specified hours and days, including coverage of all three tours, as mutually agreeable between the employee and workplace intervention analyst (EWIA) and the counselor. Counselors may adjust their schedules to respond to crisis situations.

871.35 **Scheduling**

An employee's first visit to EAP is on the clock, whether the visit is initiated by management, the union representative, or the employee concerned, unless the employee prefers to visit the EAP unit on his or her own time. Subsequent consultations are on the employee's own time.

872 Program Elements**872.1 Education**

EAP counselors and/or subcontract counselors must provide seminars periodically for all Postal Service employees so that they may become aware of the EAP services as well as the various personal problems that can affect job performance or conduct. The EAP counselor in collaboration with the employee and workplace intervention analyst (EWIA) determines where and when to provide these sessions.

872.2 Problem Identification, Referrals, and Evaluation**872.21 Patterns of Behavior and Work Performance Problems**

It is generally recognized that certain patterns of behavior and/or work performance problems can be indicative of difficulties affecting the employee. These problems may include gambling, substance abuse, emotional stress, or marital problems. Deterioration in attendance, appearance, conduct, ability, or any combination of these factors may signal that the employee is experiencing a personal problem that may affect his or her job performance.

872.22 Referrals to EAP**872.221 Management Referrals**

If a supervisor or manager observes such characteristics as listed in 872.21, or has some other reason to believe that the EAP could provide needed assistance to an employee, he or she may refer an employee to EAP in writing using the EAP referral form. The supervisor or manager should not attempt to diagnose the perceived problem. The employee has the option to refuse the referral, and the employee cannot be disciplined for noncompliance.

Exception: In instances when there is a Last Chance Agreement, or when the employee has signed a settlement agreement agreeing to participate in the EAP, the employee can be disciplined for noncompliance within the terms of the signed agreement. Regulations do not permit any EAP documentation to be placed in an employee's official personnel file (OPF).

872.222 Referrals From Others

Employees may be referred to EAP by fellow employees, union representatives, management association representatives, medical personnel, family members, or judicial or social service agencies.

872.223 Self-Referrals

Employees who desire assistance with a substance abuse or other personal problem are encouraged to seek such assistance directly by personally contacting the EAP service provider responsible for their installation.

872.224 EAP Response

The EAP counselor must accept all referrals. Face-to-face or telephone interview appointments must be available within a reasonable period from the time the request is made by the employee or family member. Face-to-face

and telephone appointments for urgent situations must be made consistent with need, regardless of the counselor's regularly scheduled hours. Crisis counseling must be available by telephone 24 hours per day, 365 days per year.

872.23 **Problem Evaluation**

EAP counseling staff provide evaluation services and arrange counseling for employees or family members or refer them to appropriate treatment providers. In cases subject to Department of Transportation (DOT) regulations, the Postal Service medical personnel should ensure that any appropriate or necessary medical examinations and evaluations are done and then monitor counseling and referrals to recovery programs with EAP counseling personnel.

872.3 **Recovery Counseling and Resources**

872.31 **EAP Counseling Units**

EAP units are staffed by EAP counseling professionals trained to counsel and provide referral services to individuals who seek their assistance. Postal EAP units are not equipped to provide detoxification or drug rehabilitation assistance, but they do make use of referral programs and other treatment facilities for these problems.

872.32 **Residential and Community Resources**

A wide variety of other outside programs and treatment facilities are available to be recommended to employees and family members. EAP counseling service providers maintain a current list of community programs and resources, and assist with initial arrangements and appointments. The cost of any such programs or treatment facilities is borne by the employee if it is not covered by the employee's health insurance. In cases for which hospitalization or detoxification is recommended, requests for sick leave, leave without pay, annual leave, or advanced sick leave are the responsibility of the employee.

872.4 **Follow-Up**

872.41 **Progress**

If a manager or a supervisor has referred an employee to EAP counseling as a result of a job performance problem, that manager or supervisor should continue to monitor the employee's job performance.

872.42 **Discontinuance of Participation**

Whether an employee opts to continue or discontinue participation in the EAP counseling, he or she is still responsible for maintaining prescribed job performance standards.

872.43 **Return to Work**

If an employee is on leave from the Postal Service to participate in an outside rehabilitative program for mental health or substance abuse issues, the EAP

counselor monitors the course of rehabilitation and assists in any contemplated return to work. After such leave, Postal Service medical personnel or a contract physician must examine the employee and make a recommendation to management regarding his or her ability to return to work. The decision to return the employee to duty rests with the installation head.

872.5 **Program Evaluation**

872.51 **General**

The EAP must be evaluated annually or more often, as needed. The purpose of these evaluations is to measure the efficiency and effectiveness of the program and to ensure that it is operating within established policy.

872.52 **District Reviews**

Evaluation teams for district reviews are initiated by the employee and workplace intervention analyst (EWIA), utilizing prescribed evaluation procedures.

872.53 **Subcontract Provider Reviews**

Responsibility for evaluation of subcontract EAP providers' credentials and offices rests with the employee and workplace intervention analyst, who utilizes established evaluation procedures.

873 **Reinstatement of Recovered Employees**

873.1 **Policy**

873.11 **Consideration of Request**

Requests for reinstatement from recovered employees should be given serious consideration, recognizing that the experience gained in former postal employment is a potentially valuable asset.

873.12 **Consideration of Other Factors**

In reviewing such reinstatement requests, local management must consider the former employee's postal work history and the nature of the charges that led to removal or resignation, as well as the eligibility factors set forth in 873.2 and those contained in Handbook EL-312, Chapter 5. Exceptions to reinstatement consideration are made whenever the employee has been investigated for violations of the law, such as theft of mail or postal property, assaults or threats, fraud, or possession and/or sale of drugs on property or on duty.

873.2 Eligibility**873.21 Procedures**

Reinstatement of an individual whose removal or resignation from the Postal Service is related to alcoholism, dependency on drugs, or other problems, may be considered when the individual:

- a. Submits a written request for reinstatement, accompanied by a signed authorization to release information, indicating the employee's written consent to a waiver of federal regulations on confidentiality restrictions.
- b. Is willing to accept reinstatement on the basis of continued participation in the EAP if deemed necessary by the EAP counselor.

873.22 Management Responsibilities

The employing official must obtain certain prior approvals when removals for cause are involved as outlined in ELM 343. For procedural requirements regarding reinstatement, see Handbook EL-312, section 233.32.

873.3 Compliance With Agreements

If a former bargaining-unit employee is reinstated to a bargaining-unit position, employing officials must comply with all relevant provisions of applicable collective-bargaining agreements in determining the employee's seniority and other contractual rights.

874 EAP Counseling Records**874.1 Policy**

Information about EAP counseling participants must be held in confidence. As restricted information, it may be disclosed only as shown in 874.4.

874.2 Definition of Restricted Information

Restricted information is information that has limitations placed upon both its access within the Postal Service and disclosure outside the Postal Service consistent with the Privacy Act and Public Health Service Act.

874.3 Custodians of Records**874.31 Postal Service Providers**

When EAP services are provided by Postal Service employee counselors, counseling records are maintained within the Privacy Act system of records, USPS 120.140, Personnel Records — Employee Assistance Program (EAP) Records. They are therefore subject to Postal Service access, disclosure, amendment, and records maintenance regulations and policy implementing the Privacy Act (39 CFR 266, ASM 353, and ASM Appendix).

874.32 Private Providers

When EAP services are provided through an interagency agreement or a private vendor, each EAP counseling service provider is responsible for

maintaining records concerning participants. These counseling records are the property of the primary provider and maintained in a system of records. The primary provider must maintain policies and procedures for safeguarding the confidentiality of client data and files and may be liable under the law for improper release of such information. The primary provider agrees to assert any privilege allowed by law and to defend vigorously Postal Service rights to confidentiality.

874.4 **Disclosure**

874.41 **General**

874.411 **Usual Recipients**

Information identifying program participants, whether or not such information is recorded, may be disclosed as follows:

- a. To medical personnel outside the Postal Service to the extent necessary to meet a *bona fide* medical emergency involving the participant.
- b. To the supervisor and/or manager for purposes of advising as to whether or not the employee appeared for any on-the-clock interview.
- c. To qualified personnel with the express written authorization of the vice president of Employee Resource Management, for purposes of conducting scientific research or program audits or evaluation. However, under no circumstances may any identifying information be disclosed in the resulting evaluation, research, or audit reports.
- d. When authorized by a court order upon showing of good cause, such as when necessary to protect against an existing threat to life or of bodily injury, or in connection with the investigation or prosecution of a crime. In addition, in litigation or an administrative proceeding when authorized by the trier of fact, when the employee offers testimony or other evidence pertaining to the content of his or her EAP participation. Counsel should be contacted for assistance in both evaluating the order and in determining the extent to which information must be released.
- e. To any person with the prior written consent of the program participant.
- f. In any situation where the counselor has a "duty to warn."
- g. To an expert, consultant, or other individual who is under contract to the Postal Service to fulfill an agency function, but only to the extent necessary to fulfill that function, and in accordance with the Privacy Act restrictions as listed under 39 CFR 266.6.

874.412 **Limitation of Disclosure**

In all cases above, only information that is absolutely necessary to satisfy the recipient's business or medical need is to be disclosed.

874.42 **Criminal Activity**

874.421 **EAP Records**

No EAP counseling records or personnel may be used to initiate or substantiate any criminal charges against a program participant or to conduct

any investigation of a participant, except as authorized by a court order for good cause.

874.422 Limitation of Confidentiality

If an EAP counseling participant reveals the commission or intended commission of serious criminal activity, the EAP counselor is not prohibited from disclosing that information so long as the employee is not identified as an EAP counseling program participant. Confidentiality does not apply in any of the following cases:

- a. A crime is committed on EAP premises or against EAP counselor personnel or a threat to commit such a crime is made.
- b. Incidents of child abuse and/or neglect (elder abuse in some states) occur.
- c. Disclosure is required to elements of the criminal justice system that have referred patients.

875 Employee and Workplace Intervention Analysts

875.1 Introduction

Employee and workplace intervention analysts ensure that the EAP is effectively administered and meeting employee and management needs. Using organizational development intervention strategies, the employee and workplace intervention analyst may make recommendations to resolve workplace climate issues and improve work environments.

875.2 Disclosure Policy

Employee and workplace intervention analysts using organizational intervention strategies to effect workplace climate and culture changes are bound by regulations according to ELM 314.52–55. Employee and workplace intervention analysts must also adhere to Freedom of Information Act and Privacy Act restrictions as listed in ASM 352–353 and Appendix and to the Professional Organizational Development Code of Ethics.

875.3 Program Elements

875.31 Problem Identification

Employee and workplace intervention analysts conduct organizational interventions, workplace climate assessments, conflict resolutions and/or threat assessments which may identify work climate and culture problems (see 871.2c).

875.32 Problem Evaluation

In conducting organizational interventions, the employee and workplace intervention analysts must make recommendations to the appropriate leadership team to enable resolution of organizational concerns.