



ClearanceJobs®

ALCOHOL

CONSUMPTION &

SECURITY CLEARANCES





In the years since the global pandemic, health and wellness experts have cautioned about the epidemics around the pandemic. The rise in alcohol consumption is one of them. The National Institutes of Health found alcohol sales increased by the largest amount in 50 years. Alcohol related incidents including DUIs are also on the rise.

Alcohol consumption is one of 13 adjudicative guidelines used to assess security clearance eligibility. Alcohol abuse, misuse and incidents can all cause security clearance denial or revocation.

Here's what you need to understand about how alcohol consumption can impact your security clearance.

The security clearance process is all about reliability and trustworthiness. Alcohol is only an issue when the government is concerned about how alcohol consumption could affect an individual's judgment and ability to protect classified information. There are no set rules concerning the amount of alcohol a security clearance holder can consume. Alcohol consumption and incidents will be considered through the totality of a person's character.

EVALUATING ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION

When does drinking become a security concern? Unlike illegal drugs, there is no prohibition against alcohol for the security clearance holder or applicant, regardless of quantity. Alcohol-related issues can cause security clearance concerns regardless of dependency or any official diagnosis of an alcohol use disorder. Alcohol becomes an issue when there is:

- Negative behavior outside of the office including driving under the influence, spousal abuse, disorderly conduct, or other issues.
- Alcohol-related incidents at work including showing up to work intoxicated.
- Habitual or binge alcohol consumption.
- Diagnosis by a qualified professional of an alcohol-related disorder.
- Failure to follow treatment once diagnosed.
- Consumption after a diagnosed alcohol-related disorder.
- Failure to follow court orders concerning alcohol education, evaluation, treatment, or abstinence.

Security clearance background investigators will look for indications of alcohol abuse or dependence. Indicators that may arise during an investigation or personnel subject interview include:

- Admitting to excessive alcohol consumption.
- Drinking alone.
- Drinking first thing in the morning.
- Strong emotions around alcohol consumption, including guilt or anger.
- Indications that alcohol is affecting other aspects of life, including work, school, or social interactions.

In evaluating alcohol incidents and whether they could be clearance issues, a security clearance adjudicator will consider likelihood of recurrence. Passage of time, an arguably minor incident, or age are all factors that could be used to mitigate alcohol consumption.

Participating in counseling or treatment programs is also a mitigating factor in the security clearance process.

CV and Alcohol Consumption

Alcohol is a security clearance factor that may fly under the radar. Continuous Vetting (CV) is making it harder for applicants to hide alcohol-related incidents, however. Alcohol related criminal incidents, employment related issues, or the financial strain of alcohol dependency could present in a CV alert. If you're struggling with alcohol, it is better to proactively report it to your security officer or employer and get help than hope the issue will go away without negatively affecting your career. Many Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) include alcohol treatment or counseling as a benefit. Don't bury your head in the sand or a bottle. Get proactive help. Seeking help is always considered a mitigating factor in the security clearance process and will not negatively affect your eligibility or future chances at a cleared career.

Most Common Continuous Vetting Alerts

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

CRIMINAL CONDUCT

DRUG INVOLVEMENT

ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION

Since Oct 1, 2023 CV has had **2,603 valid reports** for the alcohol consumption guideline (not previously known).

MYTH BUSTING

FALSE Going to AA will negatively affect your security clearance or clearance eligibility.

Many security clearance holders may fear that seeking out alcohol treatment, whether through attending meetings with groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous, or by going to a treatment facility, will negatively affect their clearance. The fact is proactive and preventative treatments, including for issues such as substance abuse, work favorably to maintain an individual's clearance eligibility.

Sober Curious? Get Serious.

Dry January, a popular yearly tradition where many give up alcohol to kick start a healthier new year, has given way to a new term in the health and wellness community – sober curious. What exactly does that mean? It's all about 'questioning your relationship with alcohol' and 'considering' if sobriety is right for you. It's prompted podcasts, a book, and a nearly half-a-billion-dollar industry of non-alcoholic beverages.

Could being sober curious help you keep your clearance eligibility? Probably not. The whole idea of the sober curious movement is to give up alcohol for your overall wellness. And while that's great – alcohol consumption issues for security clearance applicants are more serious. Becoming 'sober curious' is probably not going to be enough to mitigate prior alcohol issues – the government will be looking for abstinence, alcohol treatment, and a change in behavior that's ongoing and not temporary. If sober curious is good for your overall health and wellbeing – by all means, be curious. Just don't expect it to positively mitigate an alcohol issue.

DRY JANUARY 2024

WEDNESDAY THURSDAY FRIDAY SATURDAY

5 6 7

Alcohol Consumption Case Studies



DRIVING UNDER THE INFLUENCE = DENIAL

59-year-old Navy vet applies for a security clearance. He had DUIs in 2004 and 2009. After a period of abstinence, the applicant began drinking again around 2014, he noted. He then got another DUI in 2021. At the time of his security clearance application in 2022, he said he was continuing to consume alcohol after a brief 'reset.' The applicant admitted he would still drive after consuming alcohol, but never if he has more than one drink.

RULING: This is a case where failure to abstain from alcohol, and especially failure to stop driving after consuming alcohol, made the case for **clearance denial**.

BLACKOUT = POSSIBLE BLACKMAIL

42-year old applying for his first security clearance. No alcohol related incidents were indicated in his security clearance application. Upon questioning with a background investigator, however, the applicant indicated that he consumed alcohol to black-out levels two to three times a month. The applicant was asked to undergo a psychological evaluation through the Defense Office of Hearings and Appeals, who determined the applicant met the criteria for a severe alcohol disorder. The applicant noted that after the evaluation he began a 75-day no alcohol challenge – which he stopped on day 10. He had consumed alcohol within a couple of weeks of the DOHA hearing, and never sought alcohol treatment or counseling.

RULING: There is no hard and fast rule about the amount of alcohol consumption that creates a security clearance issue, but the government will be interested in the cause and effect. Levels of intoxication that cause you to black out are a security concern. In this case, the finding of a substance disorder and the subsequent decision to continue drinking despite that finding was likely the determining factor causing a **clearance denial**.



Alcohol Consumption Case Studies



AA + ABSTINENCE = APPROVAL

38-year-old defense contractor who had previously held a clearance while serving in the Army has his clearance request denied due to alcohol and criminal conduct issues. The applicant had a series of alcohol related arrests and incidents, including three Driving While Intoxicated (DWI) convictions, a drunk in public conviction, and disorderly conduct. The incidents spanned several years, but according to the applicant he has abstained from alcohol since 2020. The applicant had favorable character references from his supervisor and family members, including one who is a physician. The applicant indicated he had attended AA.

GRANTED

RULING: An extended period of abstinence, positive character references, and admitting to the issues in the government's charges were the critical factors that allowed the applicant to obtain a security clearance despite a lengthy series of alcohol-related incidents. Without the applicant acknowledging his prior issues, and also abstaining from alcohol for a significant time period prior to application, eligibility likely would have been denied. The judge noted that admitting to prior alcohol issues and the applicant's approximately three years of abstinence were critical to the **favorable determination**.

**Case studies pulled from the [Defense Office of Hearings and Appeals Industrial Security Program](#).*

MYTH BUSTING

FALSE

Replacing Alcohol with CBD is a Healthier Alternative.

Dry January is being touted as the alcohol industry's loss - but the marijuana industry's gain. Replacing alcohol consumption with CBD could pose clearance issues. Because marijuana is illegal at the federal level, if you start consuming CBD products to help soothe your January stress, you could face serious clearance repercussions.



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