



DRUG-FREE WORKPLACE STATISTICS

Summary

With the challenge of recruiting qualified workers becoming more difficult all over the nation, the last thing American businesses can afford is to have major portions of its existing work force abusing drugs – on or off the job. Most employees do not engage in illicit drug use, most do not want to work side-by-side with drug abusers, and a majority of employees are parents who are concerned about the effects of drug abuse on their children, now and in the future. Given this profile of the typical American workers, it is clear that substance-abuse prevention can and should be viewed as a common concern of both employers and employees.

Drug use in the workplace costs this country billions of dollars every year in lost productivity, increased health problems and workplace accidents, to say nothing of the problems it causes us at the federal and state level with associated family problems. Contrary to the typical portrayal of drug abusers, many manage to hold down full or part-time jobs, masking their destructive problem from their employers. In fact, over 74 percent of all current illegal drug users work and over 74 percent of heavy alcohol users work. (those drinking five or more drinks per occasion on five or more days in the 30 days preceding the survey).

The Importance of Workplace Drug Prevention

Increase America's Businesses Global Competitiveness

The overall cost of illicit drug abuse is estimated to have been \$160.7 billion in 2000, and 69 percent of these costs are from productivity losses due to drug-related illnesses and deaths. Reducing substance abuse positively impacts America's economic report.

An Ideal Venue to Influence Adults

Marijuana remains the most commonly abused illegal drug by employees, followed by cocaine. Clear, consistent workplace substance abuse policies and employee drug education can: (1) create an informed workforce; (2) significantly reduce drug and alcohol abuse problems in the workplace; and (3) reach employees, their families, and into their communities with prevention messages.

Small and Medium Businesses at Risk

Small businesses bear the greatest burden of substance abusers. Traditionally, larger employers participated in drug-free workplace practices and as a result small to medium employers were – in essence – adversely selected against in terms of the employees that were left to hire. Additionally, substance abusers will steer away from drug-free workplace companies and go to work for those small businesses without a program and, in particular, where there is no drug testing involved – which may result in their detection.

Substance Abuse Costs for Employers

Employee Absenteeism

Alcoholics and problem drinkers are absent from work 3.8 to 8.3 times more often than normal. Additionally, drug users are absent from work an average of five days per month due to drug use. 1

Alcohol Costs

Light and moderate drinkers cause 60 percent of tardiness, absenteeism and poor quality work as a result of alcohol consumption. Heavy drinkers and alcoholics cause the remaining 40 percent. 2

Less Productive

When they do show up, substance abusers are 33 percent less productive and cost their employers \$7,000 annually (Small Business Administration). 3 Annual productivity losses from substance abuse amount to \$640 for every American worker, regardless of whether they are substance abusers. 4

Drinking among U.S. workers can threaten public safety, impair job performance, and result in costly medical, social, and other problems affecting employees and employers alike. Productivity losses attributed to alcohol were estimated at \$119 billion for 1995. 5

Work Performance Problems

The more frequently employees get high or drunk from consuming alcohol, the more likely they are to report work-performance problems, according to a study of over 6,000 employees. Employees who abstained from alcohol reported an average of 4.2 work-performance problems in the past year; employees who were high or drunk on 13 or more days in the past month reported an average of 7.5 problems. 6

Industrial Fatalities

Up to 40 percent of industrial fatalities can be linked to alcohol abuse and alcoholism. 7

Workplace Accidents

Drug-using employees are 3.6 times more likely to be involved in workplace accidents and five times more likely to file a workers' compensation claim. 8

Higher Workers' Compensation Costs

38 percent to 50 percent of all workers' compensation claims are related to substance abuse (National Council on Compensation Insurance). 9

Higher Medical Costs

Substance abusers are three times more likely to use medical benefits than other employees. 10

More Turnover

In 1997, workers who reported current illicit drug use were more likely than those who did not report illicit drug use to have worked for three or more employers (9% vs. 4%) and voluntarily left an employer in the past year (25% vs. 15%) and to have skipped one or more days of work in the past month (13% vs. 5%). 11

Skipped Days

In 1997, workers who reported heavy alcohol use were about twice as likely as those who did not report such use to have worked for three or more employers in the past year (8% vs. 4%). 12

Workplace Theft

80 percent of drug abusers steal from their workplaces to support their drug use. 13

Workplace Violence

Substance abuse is the third leading cause of workplace violence. 14

Industries Impacted The Most

Highest Industry Rates

While 8 percent of all full-time workers aged 18-49 in 1997 had used illicit drugs in the past month, rates were significantly higher for some occupational categories. Among the occupational groups studied, food preparation workers, waiters, and bartenders had the highest rates of both current illicit drug and heavy alcohol use at 19 percent and 15 percent, respectively. Other occupational categories showing high rates of illicit drug use were construction (14%), other service occupations (13%), and transportation and material moving (10%). 15

Usage Rates Compared

Rates of current heavy alcohol use were higher among handlers, helpers and laborers (13.5%), construction workers (12.4%), precision production and repair (11.6%), other service workers (11.4%), and transportation and material moving (10.8%). In contrast, workers in administrative support and protective service reported two of the lowest rates of reported current illicit drug use (3.2% and 3.0%, respectively); workers in sales, and in professional specialty reported low rates of current heavy alcohol use (4.1% and 4.4%, respectively). 16

Socio Economic Impact

Ethnic Diversity

In 1997, the rates of current illicit drug use and heavy alcohol use was higher among workers age 18-25 than among older workers, and higher among males than females. Rates were also higher among white, non-Hispanic than among black, non-Hispanics or Hispanics and among those with less than a high school education than those with a high school degree or more education. 17

Small and Medium Employers are Particularly Challenged

Prevention Programs

According to a report from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), small workplaces are less likely than large workplaces to provide programs to prevent and treat employee drug use. About one-half of workers employed in small establishments (1 – 24 employees) reported that their employer offered information (51%) or a written policy (45%) on alcohol and/or drug use, compared to more than 80 percent of workers from medium (25 – 499 employees) and large (500 or more employees) workplaces. Employees of small establishments were also less likely to report the availability of workplace employee assistance or drug testing programs. 18

Small vs. Medium vs. Large Companies

In 1994, the majority of full-time employed current illicit drug users worked in small establishments (57% in small (1 – 24 employees), and 13% in large (500 or more employees). However, by 1997, only 44 percent of current illicit drug users worked in small establishments, 43 percent worked in medium establishments, and 13 percent worked in large establishments. 19

Alcohol Comparison

Similarly in 1994, nearly half of full-time employed heavy alcohol users worked in small establishments (44%), 40 percent worked in medium establishments, and 16 percent worked in large establishments. By 1997, only slightly more than one-third of full-time employed heavy alcohol users worked in small establishment (36%), nearly half worked in medium establishments (47%), and 17 percent worked in large establishments. 20

Written Policies

In 1997, workers in small establishments who reported current illicit drug use were less likely than non-users in small establishments to say that their workplace had a written policy for drug and alcohol use (36% vs. 47%). 21

Provided EAPs

In 1994, 15 percent of current illicit drug users who worked at small establishments reported that their workplace provided access to employee assistance programs (EAPs); by 1997, it had increased to 28 percent. During this same period, the rate of current illicit drug use among workers in small establishments decreased (from 11% to 8.6%). 22

Comparison Over the Years

A dramatic shift occurred in current illicit drug users and heavy alcohol users from small (1 – 24 employees) to medium-sized establishments (25 – 499). In 1994, the majority of full-time employed current illicit drug users worked in small establishments – 57 percent in small; 30 percent in medium, and 13 percent in large. However, by 1997, only 44 percent of current illicit drug users worked in small establishments, 43 percent worked in medium establishments, and 13 percent worked in large establishments. 23

The rate of current illicit drug use declined in small establishments from 11percent in 1994 to 9 percent in 1997, and increased in mid-sized establishments from slightly more than 5 percent in 1994 to almost 8 percent in 1997. 24

Data Sources

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- 15 See Footnote 11, p.2.
- 16 See Footnote 11, p.21.
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19 See Footnote 11, p.1.

20 See Footnote 11, p.2.

21 See Footnote 11, p.2.

22 See Footnote 11, p.3.

23 Worker Drug Use and Workplace Policies and Programs: Results from the 1994 and 1997 NHSDA, Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, September 25, 1999 .

24 Id.

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