

DRUGS IN THE WORKPLACE

A DANGEROUS COMBINATION A COLLABORATIVE SOLUTION

By **Elena Carr** and **Dr. Don Wright**

Construction sites are among the most dangerous workplaces in the country. While joint efforts by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), companies and workers have improved conditions significantly, much work remains to be done.

Drug-free workplace programs are natural complements to other initiatives that help ensure safe and healthy workplaces. By educating workers about the dangers of drug abuse and encouraging individuals with related problems to seek help, drug-free workplace programs help reduce occupational injuries and illnesses. Drug-free workplace programs also send a clear signal that the safety, health and well-being of workers are important.

Although not required by the Occupational Safety and Health Act, OSHA has implemented a number of initiatives to encourage and empower employers and employees—especially those in high-risk industries such as construction—to work together to ensure their workplaces stay free of the hazards of alcohol and drug abuse.

America's Workplaces at Risk

The vast majority of individuals who abuse or are dependent on alcohol or drugs are employed. In 2003, 14.9 million (77 percent) of the 19.4 million adults aged 18 or older who abuse or are dependent on alcohol or drugs worked either full or part time. This amounts to more than ten percent of full-time workers, as well as more than ten percent of part-time workers.¹

Industries with the highest rates of abuse are the same as those with high rates of occupational injuries, including construction. Also, the highest rates of abuse are reported by young male workers aged 18–25, who are disproportionately represented in the construction industry.²

Furthermore, research indicates that between ten and twenty percent of the nation's workers

who die on the job test positive for alcohol or other drugs.³ But safety and health are not the only aspects of a work organization that can suffer from substance abuse. Worker substance abuse leads to decreased employee productivity and morale and increased utilization of health benefits. It can also jeopardize an organization's security, public image and community relations.

The good news is that employers and employees can improve safety and health in their workplaces by working together to implement drug-free workplace programs that educate employees about the dangers of alcohol and drug abuse and encourage individuals with related problems to seek help.

What is a Drug-Free Workplace?

A drug-free workplace is a work environment where all employees understand that illicit use of drugs and abuse of alcohol while working is unacceptable and where there are policies and programs in place to discourage such behavior and facilitate treatment and recovery for individuals with related problems.

A comprehensive drug-free workplace program includes five elements: a written policy, employee education, supervisor training, an employee assistance program and drug testing (see **The Five-Pronged Approach to a Drug-Free Workplace**, page 18). Although organizations may choose not to include all five components, research shows more effective programs do include all five elements.

Most private sector drug-free workplace programs are not governed by specific federal law. However, many states have laws and regulations that specify how workplace drug testing should be conducted and several states offer workers' compensation insurance discounts for companies with drug-free workplace programs that meet certain criteria. In addition, if a company with a union wants to implement drug testing, it must negotiate this through the collective bargaining process.

Secretary of Labor Drug-Free Workplace Alliance Ceremony



U.S. Department of Labor

Secretary of Labor Elaine L. Chao signed the Drug-Free Workplace Alliance agreement on October 12, 2004 with (from left) Joseph J. Hunt of the International Association of Bridge, Structural, Ornamental and Reinforcing Iron Workers; Frank Hanley of the International Union of

Operating Engineers; Doug McCarron of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America; and Newton B. Jones of the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers.

Joining Forces to Promote Drug-Free Workplaces

As part of its drug-free workplace initiative, OSHA, along with the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) and DOL's Working Partners for an Alcohol- and Drug-Free Workplace (Working Partners) program, has formed an alliance with four international labor unions: the International Union of Operating Engineers; the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America; the International Association of Bridge, Structural, Ornamental and Reinforcing Iron Workers; and the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers (see photo).

The Alliance is DOL's first cooperative agreement to focus exclusively on improving worker safety and health through drug-free workplace programs. To implement the Alliance, OSHA, MSHA and Working Partners are working collaboratively with the Boilermakers, Carpenters,

Ironworkers and Operating Engineers to provide their members with information, guidance and training resources on the benefits of drug-free workplace programs and how to implement them to protect workers' health and safety. Efforts will focus on educating workers on the safety hazards created by the abuse of alcohol and other drugs in construction and mining workplaces.

Potential Alliance activities include producing and distributing targeted brochures and other training and educational materials that direct employees to substance abuse information and resources; promoting drug-free workplace tools and resources through union Web sites and publications; and educating OSHA and MSHA field staff on drug-free workplace programs and how to recognize the signs of workplace substance abuse during inspections and accident investigations. Alliance partners also are pursuing speaking opportunities to spread the word

A Five-Pronged Approach

- 1. Written Policy** – Serves as the foundation for a drug-free workplace. Effective policies should clearly state why the policy is being implemented, describe prohibited behaviors and explain consequences for violation. It is essential that the policy be shared and understood by all and consistently applied.
- 2. Employee Education** – Provides employees with information they need to adhere to and benefit from the drug-free workplace program. It also informs employees about the nature of addiction; its effect on work performance, health and personal life; and help available for those with problems.
- 3. Supervisor Training** – Teaches supervisors, managers and foremen to enforce the policy and helps them recognize and deal with employees who have performance problems stemming from substance abuse. Supervisors must not, however, be expected to diagnose or provide counseling.
- 4. Employee Assistance Program (EAP)** – Offers free, confidential workplace-based services to help workers resolve a wide variety of personal problems, including alcohol and drug abuse. EAPs offer assessment, short-term counseling, referral and follow-up services. Absent an EAP, organizations should provide information about community resources, treatment programs and helplines for people with alcohol or drug problems.
- 5. Drug Testing** – Provides concrete evidence for intervention and/or disciplinary action, but may not be appropriate for all workplaces. Policies must clearly stipulate who will be tested, when tests will be conducted, which drugs will be tested for, how tests will be conducted and the consequences of a positive test.

about steps the construction industry can take to address the issue. In fact, representatives from OSHA, Working Partners and the Operating Engineers delivered a keynote presentation about the topic at the Construction Safety Conference held in Chicago in February.

OSHA also recently developed a Web page on workplace substance abuse that supports drug-free workplace programs (see **OSHA Speaks Out in Support of Drug-Free Workplace Programs**, page 20) and refers employers and workers to tools on DOL's Working Partners Web site that can help them develop drug-free workplace programs. This site includes a wide range of materials, such as a policy builder tool, free training and educational materials, helplines for employees, basic information about substance abuse and how it impacts employment, and information about state and local organizations that may assist in workplace-based drug prevention and intervention efforts (see photo).

Given the construction industry's risk for occupational accidents and injuries, substance abuse in the workplace creates a perilous – and yet preventable – hazard. Building drug-free workplaces in the construction industry requires collaborative solutions through which employers and employees join forces to discourage workplace alcohol and drug abuse. DOL's drug-free workplace resources and cooperative efforts can help them do so by providing effective blueprints for drug-free workplace programs that improve worker safety and health.

Sources:

- 1 Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, *2003 National Survey on Drug Use and Health*, September 2004
- 2 Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, *Substance Use, Dependence or Abuse Among Full-Time Workers*, September 2002
- 3 Weber, William and Cox, Cherron, *Work-related Fatal Injuries in 1998, Compensation and Working Conditions*, Spring 2001. 🛑



Elena Carr is Drug Policy Coordinator and Director of the Working Partners for an Alcohol- and Drug-Free Workplace program in DOL's Office of the Assistant Secretary for Policy. Dr. Don Wright is the Director of OSHA's Office of Occupational Medicine.



Working Partners for an Alcohol- and Drug-Free Workplace

Working Partners strives to build a drug-free workforce by equipping businesses and communities with tools and information to effectively address drug and alcohol problems.

In Focus

- [Brochure Offers Free and Easy Way to Educate Employees about Substance Abuse Disorders](#)
- [Rankings Reveal Construction and Mining Have Highest Percentage of Problem Drinkers](#)
- [Materials from Mine Safety Substance Abuse Summit Available](#)

Find It! in DOL

- [About Working Partners](#)
- [Working Partners News Room](#)
- [Substance Abuse Information Database \(SAID\)](#)
 - [Search](#)
 - [Browse](#)
 - [What's New](#)
- [Drug-Free Workplace Advisor](#)
 - [Drug-Free Workplace Act of 1988](#)
 - [Program Builder](#)
- [Training & Educational Materials](#)
- [Resource Directories](#)
 - [National Resources](#)
 - [State Resources](#)
 - [State and Territory Laws](#)
 - [Helplines](#)

DOL's Working Partners for an Alcohol- and Drug-Free Workplace Web Site (www.dol.gov/workingpartners) helps

employers and employees work together to ensure a safe and drug-free working environment.

OSHA Strongly Supports Drug-Free Workplace Aim

OSHA recognizes that impairment by drug or alcohol use can constitute an avoidable workplace hazard and that drug-free workplace programs can help improve worker safety and health and add value to American businesses. OSHA strongly supports comprehensive drug-free workforce programs, especially within certain workplace environments, such as those involving safety-sensitive duties like operating machinery.

A comprehensive drug-free workforce approach includes five components—a policy,

supervisor training, employee education, employee assistance and drug testing. Such programs, especially when drug testing is included, must be reasonable and take into consideration employees' right to privacy.

OSHA understands that many workers with substance abuse problems can be returned safely to the workplace provided they have access to appropriate treatment, continuing care and supportive services.

More information is available on OSHA's Safety and Health Topics Page on Workplace Substance Abuse: <http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/substanceabuse>.