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ALCOHOL & OTHER DRUGS IN THE WORKPLACE

From assembly lines to boardrooms, substance abuse and addiction are problems that plague the workplace. If those problems wreak havoc in one's personal life, you can bet they're prominent in the workplace. Alcohol is the most widely abused drug among working adults, especially among full-time workers aged 18-25, of whom 38% are binge drinkers (at least five drinks in a row for men, four for women).¹

Eric Goplerud, a research professor who works with Ensuring Solutions to Alcohol Problems at George Washington University Department of Health Policy, puts real numbers to the impact of "alcohol abuse" in the workplace. Goplerud helped develop an online tool called "The Ensuring Solutions Alcohol Cost Calculator" (www.ensuringsolutions.org) that computes company-specific information on the extent and cost of alcohol problems in the workplace. The tool estimates the number of people at a particular company who suffer from alcohol problems and how those problems affect the company's bottom line.²

Addressing addiction problems early on in the workplace is the humane thing to do, the cost-effective thing to do, said Dr. James Quayle, V.P. of Medical Affairs at Kimberly-Clark Corporation. Quayle said his company of 60,000 employees has had an alcohol and drug policy for over 25 years that stresses education and early intervention. "I don't know why a company would be resistant to treating the illness and getting an employee into recovery," he said. "Recovering employees come back to us better than ever. They are rejuvenated, productive employees and are grateful for the chance to turn their lives around."²

A few facts help describe the human and economic toll of substance abuse in the workplace:

- About 23 million Americans suffer from alcohol and drug addiction: 75% of those people are employed, but only 20% get help for their problem¹
- 80% of heavy drinkers (five or more drinks in one occasion, at least five times in the last month) in the United States are employed.¹
- Alcohol and drug abuse cost American businesses about \$100 billion in lost productivity each year.¹
- The alcoholic/drug addicted employee not only expose themselves to danger and impaired performance, but they compromise the safety, productivity, and morale of fellow workers.¹
- The alcoholic/drug addicted employee incurs twice the healthcare costs of the average employee, is more likely to steal from their employer, more likely to be involved in workplace accidents, three times more likely to report for work late, and five times more likely to file a worker's compensation claim.¹
- Young workers are more likely to use illicit drugs if they experience high levels of stress and low levels of control in their jobs. Researchers led by Phillip L. Reed of Michigan State University surveyed 1,000 young adults and found that those with high job strain (work that is mentally or physically taxing and offers little freedom to make decisions) were more likely to use marijuana, cocaine, heroin, and other illicit drugs.

¹Hazelden "Alive & Free" health column, published 8/11/03, www.hazelden.org

²Hazelden "Alive & Free" health column, published 3/22/04, www.hazelden.org

³Join Together free news, published 3/2/06, www.jointogether.org

Updated 1/07

Resource from NCADA's RADAR library. For more information, visit our website at www.ncada-stl.org. For questions on substance use, abuse and related problems, call NCADA's help Line at (314)962-3456.