



OFFICE OF NATIONAL DRUG CONTROL POLICY

Executive Office of the President

HOW ILLICIT DRUG USE AFFECTS BUSINESS AND THE ECONOMY

The Federal Government and business community are increasingly recognizing the negative consequences of substance abuse on the U.S. economy and the Nation's workforce. Abuse of drugs and alcohol is costly for our society and, left untreated, places a burden on our workplace, our healthcare system, and our communities. A number of reports and surveys highlight the detrimental effects substance abuse has on business productivity and competitiveness as it also increases workplace injuries and absenteeism.

The following data provide a stark illustration of consequences of drug use in our society.

Economic Costs

- The economic cost of drug abuse in the United States was estimated at \$193 billion in 2007,¹ the last available estimate. This value includes:
 - ❖ \$120 billion in lost productivity, mainly due to labor participation costs, participation in drug-abuse treatment, incarceration, and premature death;
 - ❖ \$11 billion in healthcare costs – for drug treatment and drug-related medical consequences; and
 - ❖ \$61 billion in criminal justice costs, primarily due to criminal investigation, prosecution and incarceration, and victim costs.

Labor Force

- In 2009, the majority (67%) of current drug users aged 18 or older were employed, either full-time (48%) or part-time (19%), with the unemployed accounting for 13% and the remaining 21% not in the labor force.²
- Among full-time workers aged 18 or older, nearly one in 12 (8%) reported past-month (current) use of an illicit drug in 2009.³ Unemployed workers were twice as likely – one in six (17%) – to report current drug use in 2009.⁴

Turnover and Absenteeism

- From 2002 to 2004, full-time workers aged 18-64 who reported current illicit drug use were more than twice as likely as those reporting no current illicit drug use to report they had worked for three or more employers in the past year (12.3% versus 5.1%).⁵
- In the same period, full-time workers who were current drug users were more likely to report missing two or more workdays in the past month due to illness or injury, when compared with workers who were not current users (16.4% vs. 11.0%).⁶
- Full-time workers who were current drug users also were about twice as likely as non-users to skip one or more days of work in the past month (16.3% vs. 8.2%).⁷

School Performance

- Students who are not current marijuana users are more than twice as likely to report an average grade of “A” than those who are current users of marijuana (30.5% vs. 12.5%).⁸
- College students who use prescription stimulant medications for non-medical purposes typically have lower grade point averages and are more likely to be heavy drinkers and users of other illicit drugs. They also are more likely to meet diagnostic criteria for dependence on alcohol and marijuana, skip class more frequently, and spend less time studying.⁹

Resources Available for Employers to Create a Drug-Free Workplace

Preventing drug use in the workplace and supporting employees in recovery are vital to ensuring a healthy, safe, and productive workforce. The Federal Government provides a number of resources to help employers create an alcohol and drug-free policy for their companies:

- **Drug-Free Workplace Advisor**
Provides information for businesses about how to establish and maintain an alcohol- and drug-free workplace. <http://www.dol.gov/elaws/drugfree.htm>
- **Employers' Kit to Developing a Drug-Free Workplace**
The Department of Health and Human Services has created this kit to assist employers in setting a drug-free workplace policy. <http://www.drugfreeworkplace.org>
- **Working Partners: Guidelines for Developing an Alcohol- and Drug-Free Workplace**
The Department of Labor has created this guide with the help of industry partners to advise businesses wanting to create a drug-free workplace policy. <http://www.dol.gov/workingpartners/welcome.html>
- **State and Territory Laws**
Many states have regulations that impact when, where, and how employers can implement drug-free workplace programs. Check this site for a summary of rules that apply to businesses in your state. <http://www.dol.gov/asp/programs/drugs/said/StateLaws.asp>
- **Substance Abuse Information Database**
Learn about workplace substance-abuse issues and develop drug-free workplace programs. <http://www.dol.gov/asp/programs/drugs/said/default.asp>
- **Training and Educational Materials**
Free posters, brochures, and presentation materials. <http://www.dol.gov/asp/programs/drugs/workingpartners/materials/materials.asp>

¹ National Drug Intelligence Center. National Threat Assessment: the Economic Impact of Illicit Drug Use on American Society. May 2011. Department of Justice, Washington, DC.

² Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA]. 2009 National Survey on Drug Use and Health [NSDUH] (September 2010).

³ SAMHSA. 2009 NSDUH (September 2010).

⁴ SAMHSA. 2009 NSDUH (September 2010).

⁵ SAMHSA. Worker Substance Use and Workplace Policies and Programs. (June 2007).

⁶ SAMHSA. Worker Substance Use and Workplace Policies and Programs. (June 2007).

⁷ SAMHSA. Worker Substance Use and Workplace Policies and Programs. (June 2007).

⁸ SAMHSA. 2007 and 2008 National Surveys on Drug Use and Health, unpublished special tabulations (September 2010).

⁹ Arria AM; DuPont RL. Nonmedical Prescription Stimulant Use Among College Students: Why We Need to Do Something and What We Need to Do. *Journal of Addictive Diseases*. 29;4:417-426. 2010.