

Hospitality Workers Have High Rates of Alcohol Problems

Hospitality workers have the highest rate of serious alcohol problems among U.S. industries, with 15 percent of workers in the federally defined "leisure, hospitality and arts" market segment suffering from alcohol-related problems, a new study finds.

The report, *"Workplace Screening & Brief Intervention: What Employers Can and Should Do About Excessive Alcohol Use"* -- issued by Ensuring Solutions to Alcohol Problems, a research center at the George Washington University Medical Center -- found the highest level of serious alcohol problems in the hospitality, construction, and wholesale industries.

"Most employees represented in these numbers are not dependent on alcohol," said Eric Goplerud, Ph.D., director of Ensuring Solutions. "But they do use alcohol in ways that lead to short-term safety problems and long-term health consequences."

Alcohol problems were significantly worse among male workers than female workers, researchers found: for example, male construction workers were 50 percent more likely to have alcohol-related problems than women in similar jobs, while men in wholesaling jobs were three times more likely to be problem drinkers than their female counterparts. Alcohol problems also were more common among younger workers (ages 18 to 25) than older workers.

The report recommended that more primary-care doctors, workplace wellness programs, and employee-assistance programs begin screening and brief intervention (SBI) for alcohol problems among workers, which Goplerud called a "proven approach that promises to effectively reduce workplace alcohol problems."

"The impact of alcohol problems in the workplace is a tremendous hidden challenge, in part because very few people with an alcohol problem are ever identified," said Andrew Webber, president and CEO of the National Business Coalition on Health. "In the past, employers have led the way to doing more for people with chronic diseases like diabetes and heart disease. It's time for American industry to do the same for people with alcohol problems."

The findings were based on an analysis of two major government surveys: the National Survey on Drug Use and Health and the National Comorbidity Study.

Workplace Study Finds Less Evidence of Methamphetamine Use

Quest Diagnostics reported that positive drug-test results for methamphetamine declined in every region of the U.S. except for the Northeast last year; separately, the Drug Enforcement Administration reported that seizures of illicit meth labs declined 31 percent in 2007.

"When we are able to put strategic pressure on the supply of these drugs, what we're seeing is a direct effect for the better on the number of users that we can actually measure with drug tests," said John Walters, director of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy.

However, the Quest report found that positive tests for other types of amphetamines rose 5 percent, leading to speculation that some users may be substituting other kinds of stimulants for methamphetamine.

Mexican-based "superlabs" have cranked out greater supplies of methamphetamine to make up for the drop in supply from U.S.-based meth labs, which have been impacted by new laws restricting sales of prescription medications containing ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, which can be used to cook meth. The DEA, however, says that interdiction efforts have curtailed the supply of meth from Mexico, as well.

"We for the first time on the meth front hear the traffickers themselves and informants report that there's a change," said DEA Acting Administrator Michele Leonhart. "They are having a hard time getting the product out of Mexico."

Happy Spring

