

Improving Student Understanding of *Drugs in the Workplace*

**A Manual for High School Teachers & Career
Counselors**



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WORKDRUGFREE OREGON
An Oregon Business Plan Initiative

I. Introduction

Businesses in five of the nine Oregon Business Plan Bus Tour stops in 2004 (Medford, Klamath Falls, Bend, Eugene & La Grande) identified drug use as a key obstacle to hiring otherwise qualified workers.¹ Difficulty in finding applicants who can pass a pre-employment drug test increases the financial burden of employers who already incur significant expense combating drug use by employees.

Absenteeism, tardiness, lost productivity, and injury are the primary problems caused by employee alcohol or drug abuse. In 2006, over three-quarters (77%) of Oregon employers say on-the-job substance abuse is of some or great concern.²

Most substance abusers are employed--74% of illicit drug users and 79.5% of heavy or binge drinkers work.³ The group of workers at highest risk for every substance is young workers 18 to 25 years of age, a fact of considerable note as the baby boom generation begins to retire over the next decade and younger workers become a larger percentage of the overall workforce.⁴

Substance abuse rates among Oregon high school students – our future workforce – remain alarmingly high. Alcohol use by Oregon 8th graders is 76% higher than nationally (30% in Oregon vs. 17% nationally). One of every four 11th graders and one of every 8th graders report binge drinking. One of 20 Oregon youth ages 12-17 abuse or are dependent upon one or more illicit drugs. Oregon 8th and 11th graders are more likely to smoke marijuana than cigarettes.⁵

Underage drinking is widespread in Oregon with 44% of high school students reporting at least one drink of alcohol on one or more occasions in the past 30 days, and 30% reporting binge drinking (5 or more drinks in a row) in the past 30 days.⁶ It starts as early as middle school with Oregon 8th graders consuming alcohol in 2002 at a much higher rate (25%) than their counterparts in Washington (17.8%) or nationally (19.6%).⁷

In 2006, a new Oregon Business Plan initiative entitled *Workdrugfree Oregon* was approved as part of the *Meet Targeted Workforce Needs of Industry* initiative (see www.oregonbusinessplan.org). The Workdrugfree Oregon Employer Task Group recommended that Oregon employers (public and private) assist the State Board of Education in creating a Career-Related Learning Standard to prepare students for successful employment in a drug-free workplace.

At that time, employer expectations related to drug and alcohol use rates among students had received little attention under Oregon school reform. In June 2008, however, the State Board of Education adopted the Essential Skills as part of the new Oregon Diploma requirements. It also approved a timeline for merging the Career-Related Learning Standards with the essential skills; graduates of 2012 will be the first

¹ Williams, Christina. (2004, Nov.) Is the Oregon Economy Headed for a Drug Bust? *Oregon Business*.

² Drugfree Workplace Programs in Oregon – A Survey of Employers, Oregon Employment Dept., Dec. 2006.

³ Zhang Z, Huang LX, & Brittingham, AM. (1999). Worker Drug Use and Workplace Policies and Programs: Results from the 1994 and 1997 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse (SAMHSA Analytic Series: A-11). Rockville MD: SAMHSA.

⁴ Center for Substance Abuse Prevention. (2004). Contextual and Other Factors Related to Workplace-Based Substance Abuse Prevention and Early Intervention for Adolescents and Young Adults.

⁵ Alcohol, Drug & Tobacco Consumption & Consequences in Oregon, 2007 Executive Summary, Oregon Epidemiological Outcomes Work Group, Addictions & Mental Health Division, Oregon Dept. of Human Services

⁶ Pacific Institute for Research & Evaluation. (2004) Underage Drinking in Oregon: The Facts.,

⁷ Oregon Progress Board. (2005). 2005 Benchmark Performance Report.

to meet these new requirements.⁸ **Workdrugfree Oregon developed a Career-Related Learning Experience (CRLE) to meet the Employment Foundations criteria: “Exhibit safe work behaviors, such as working free of the influence of alcohol and drugs, and other risky behaviors.”**

The *Drugs in the Workplace* CRLE is a 40-minute classroom presentation by employers to communicate the risks of substance abuse to employment. Using a customizable powerpoint, employers describe their company drug-free workplace policy, including drug testing and employee assistance programs, and their safety and productivity concerns related to employee substance abuse. Additionally, presenters provide real-life examples of the risks of substance abuse to jobs and careers.

With funding by Clatskanie School District, *Drugs in the Workplace* was evaluated by Anna Foucek, MPH, using student pre and post surveys to measure changes in attitude and increases in student understanding, as well as teacher surveys of presenters’ effectiveness. The results demonstrated that student understanding of employer expectations improved and that the presentations were of overall good quality.

Changing student attitudes about drug use in the workplace through education should ultimately lead to more positive behaviors concerning substance abuse. Students who see drug use as a barrier to future employment goals will be less likely to use drugs. This manual will assist teachers and career counselors in implementing a *Drugs in the Workplace* CRLE.

II. CONCEPTUAL MODEL

Drugs in the Workplace employer presentations provide students with information about substance abuse and employment. Students’ knowledge about these topics should increase as representatives of local employers share with students their organization’s drugfree workplace program and examples of specific cases of negative work and life outcomes as a result of substance abuse. Students who know they may fail a drug test may be less likely to use drugs and risk unemployment.

The information presented during *Drugs in the Workplace* presentations may influence some protective factors associated with the likelihood of future drug use. Because the presenters are potential future employers for students, the information should be relevant for them. The fear of not being hired for a job may be greater than other consequences high school students may associate with drug and alcohol use, such as getting in trouble with parents. Understanding the consequences of drug use at work, such as the occurrence of accidents, may also decrease students’ tolerance for deviance around alcohol and drug use.

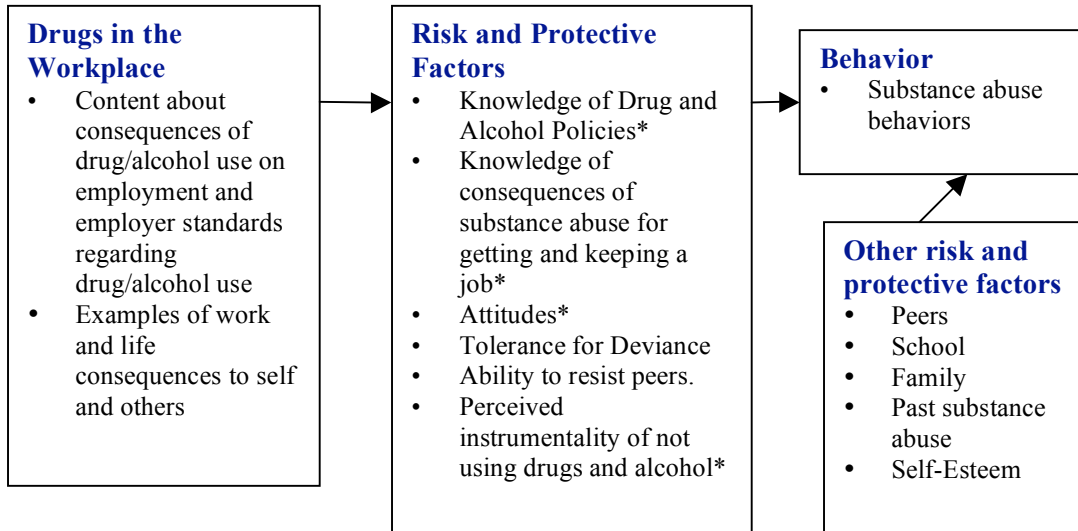
Students will be getting this information as part of a class, with their peers present. The shared knowledge within peer groups may encourage students to refrain from abusing drugs and alcohol. Additionally, if students’ peers are present for the employer presentations, they may be more likely to accept a student’s decision not to use, even if the rest of the group makes a different decision.

Other risk and protective factors outlined above may also influence whether the knowledge gained at the *Drugs in the Workplace* presentations influences student attitudes and behaviors. Specifically, students with higher self-esteem and who have not used drugs and alcohol in the past should be more likely to have positive attitudes concerning drug and alcohol use in the workplace. Additionally, students who are in peer

⁸ CRLS-Essential Skills Merger, Oregon Dept. of Education, 9/08/2008.

groups that do not pressure drug use, students who are from homes that discourage drug use, and students who are doing well in school should have more positive attitudes in the future.

Changing student attitudes about drug use in the workplace through education should ultimately lead to more positive behaviors concerning substance abuse. Students who see drug use as a barrier to future employment goals will be less likely to use drugs. **The goal of the *Drugs in the Workplace* program is to reduce substance abuse by targeting student knowledge and attitudes:**



*Factors measured in student survey

III. PURPOSE & LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The *Drugs in the Workplace* program strives to educate students on the real-world consequences of using illegal drugs in the workplace. If whole peer groups learn that using illegal drugs may cause them to not be hired or lose a job, they may be more likely to resist peer pressure than if they were simply told to not use drugs. Many students in their final years of high school are thinking about entering the workforce. Educating 11th and 12th grade students about the serious consequences associated with illegal substance abuse may in turn change their attitudes, and ultimately behaviors.

The *Drugs in the Workplace* program is relevant to high school students who will be seeking employment after graduation. Tying the consequences of substance abuse to a paying job may be extremely relevant to students. When students realize they may not get hired or can get fired if they fail a drug test, this knowledge may change their attitudes and ultimately their behaviors around substance abuse.

Learning Objectives

Students should understand:

- The purpose of a workplace drug and alcohol policy;
- A particular employer's drug and alcohol policy for job applicants and current employees;
- Basic statistics about prevalence of drug and alcohol use in the community or job type;
- How drug testing and Employee Assistance Programs work (if applicable);
- Consequences of drug use/alcohol to:
 - job applicants,
 - employees,
 - coworkers, and
 - employers.

Key Elements of the Employer Presentation

Briefly, the *content* includes a number of elements such as explaining the reasons why employers have drug and alcohol policies and how a particular employer's drug and alcohol policy works. The *relevance* of the information is illustrated for students by means of stories and examples regarding the results of substance abuse for job applicants, employees, coworkers, and the employers.

Outcomes of *Drugs in the Workplace* Employer Presentations

The presentations should lead to two categories of outcomes which are described in Kraiger et al.'s (1993) framework for assessing training outcomes. First are *affective outcomes*. Specifically, as a result of the presentation, students should exhibit changed attitudes toward the use of illegal drugs and alcohol in the workplace. Second, students should demonstrate *increased knowledge* of the material.

IV. ROLE OF TEACHER OR CAREER COUNSELOR

STEP 1: Identify Participating Students

Prior to scheduling an employer presenter, the Teacher or Career Counselor should determine which 11th or 12th grade class (of not more than 30 students) shall be invited to participate and the dates and times available on the school schedule. These employer presentations may be scheduled as part of a regular class or as part of any group worksite learning experience, such as a company tour or group job shadow.

STEP 2: Request Employer Presentation

The Teacher or Career Counselor should request a 45-minute presentation by an employer with an established drugfree workplace program and specifically, by an employer representative who is highly knowledgeable about that program, such as a Human Resources professional. **For assistance in identifying interested employers, contact Mimi Bushman, Workdrugfree Oregon, (see contact information below).**

The presenter should be asked to:

- ✚ Adapt the *Drugs in the Workplace* customizable powerpoint presentation (accessible at www.workdrugfreeoregon.org) to his or her company's drugfree workplace program
- ✚ Reserve 10-15 minutes for questions and discussion.

STEP 3: Confirm Employer Presentation

If the employer is willing to present, the Teacher or Career Counselor should:

- ✚ Confirm the date, time and location of the presentation
- ✚ Describe the student audience (age, class)
- ✚ Request the presenter's biographical information in order to introduce him or her to the class
- ✚ Provide (or ask the presenter to provide) powerpoint presentation equipment.

STEP 4: Thank the Presenter.

IV. *Drugs in the Workplace* Contact Information

For questions or assistance, contact:

**Mimi Bushman, Workdrugfree Oregon
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Salem, Oregon 97301-4030**

**(503) 588-0050 ext. 235 (Salem)
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