

BUILD A DRUG-FREE OREGON WORKFORCE

Oregon Business Plan “Meet Targeted Workforce Needs of Industry” Initiative

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It’s amazing how fast meth can completely ruin a person. We’ve had to let two people go as a direct result of this devastating drug. As a small business (12 employees), that makes a big impact. - Scott Tice, Tice Industries, Portland

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. The difficulty in finding workers who can pass a pre-employment drug test increases the financial burden of Oregon employers who already incur significant expense in combating drug use among current workers.

The percentage of Oregon employers identifying on-the-job drug use as a great concern rose to an unprecedented high (60%) in 2003. Three fourths of illicit drug users and heavy or binge drinkers are employed. Drug use costs U.S. employers \$75-\$100 billion annually and employee use is twice as prevalent in small businesses. The rate of positive amphetamine screens among the safety-sensitive workforce is significantly higher in Oregon than in the rest of the nation, most likely due to the rising popularity of methamphetamine.

Individual (primarily larger) Oregon businesses invest in comprehensive drug-free workplace (DFW) programs, which can reduce turnover, absenteeism, and workers compensation and health costs and increase productivity. However, full implementation of all components of DFW is spotty even among larger employers. Unlike other states, there has been no systematic, statewide business community campaign to boost the number of drug-free workplaces through information and financial incentives.

In addition, Oregon lacks a unified strategic approach to address substance abuse in the *workforce*. The rate of abuse among unemployed workers is twice as high as among employed workers, yet the public workforce system is “disinclined” to refer job seekers to treatment resources. In the high schools, substance abuse rates remain alarmingly high, yet Oregon’s learning standards make no mention of the importance to jobs and careers of being drug-free.

Clearly, government agencies and businesses are not on the same page regarding a key economic and workforce development issue: *how to strengthen the health and productivity of the workforce by reducing substance abuse*. When businesses report they have difficulty hiring otherwise qualified workers who can pass a pre-employment drug test, they are in effect saying “this problem is bigger than my company’s drug testing program.”

The drug issue is beginning to impact our ability to recruit or expand industry in our region. Master Brand (Grants Pass) no longer can find employees to support their expansion. - Monte Mendenhall, Chair, Southern Oregon Economic Development Inc.

The Task Group recommends that Oregon employers (public and private), under the leadership of the Workdrugfree Employer Task Group, should:

- **Mount a statewide campaign to boost the percentage of certified drug-free workplaces from 25% in 2006 to 75% in 2008.** The campaign should include employer-to-employer education and mentoring, technical assistance and training, and drugfree workplace discounted services. It should also engage insurers and legislators in exploring financial incentives that encourage drug-free workplace programs.
- **Raise legislators' awareness of the impact of drugs on business competitiveness.** Continue to engage them in developing legislation to better align employer responsibility to accommodate medical marijuana cardholders with workplace safety and productivity needs.
- **Assist Oregon's Workforce Investment Board in establishing a Substance Abuse Prevention Standard for job seekers that meets employer needs.** Include a workforce agency policy statement, supervisor and staff training, and improved linkage with substance abuse evaluation services. Evaluate the standard through a demonstration project.
- **Assist the State Board of Education in creating a Career-Related Learning Standard to prepare students for employment in a drug-free workplace.** Assist education agencies in strengthening school drug policies and encourage employer Drugs in the Workplace classroom or worksite presentations.

Workdrugfree Employer Task Group

Don Skundrick, LTM, Inc., *Chair*

Mark Branlund, ReMax Equity Group

Diana Corder, Pacific Power

Kathleen Nielson, US Bank

Eileen Drake, PCC Structurals, *Vice Chair*

Sharon Skoltock, Willamette Valley Medical Center

Stacy Stack, Express Personnel

Scott Tice, Tice Industries

Public Sector Partners

Tom Byerley & Graham Slater, Oregon Employment Department

Cam Preus-Braly, Oregon Community Colleges & Workforce Development

Jim Schoelkopf, Oregon Department of Education

Robert E. Nikkel & Karen Wheeler, Oregon Department of Human Services

Contact: Mimi Bushman, Workdrugfree, Oregon Nurses Foundation, bushman@oregonrn.org, www.oregonrn.org

