

Illicit Drug Users Hold Full-Time Jobs

According to a study released in 2007, the majority of the US's approximately 16.4 million illicit drug users and 15 million heavy alcohol users hold full-time jobs. The study also found that drug users and heavy drinkers were more likely to have higher levels of absenteeism and more job changes. "Worker Substance Use and Workplace Policies and Programs," was administered by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The findings are based on data collected from 128,000 persons from all 50 states aged 18 – 64 over three years.

Of the total 16.4 million illicit drug users, approximately 9.4 million of them (including 7.3 million marijuana users) held full-time jobs. Of the 15 million heavy drinkers, 10.1 million were employed full-time. "Heavy" alcohol use was defined as having more than five drinks on one occasion more than five times in the past month. Additionally, the study found that 3 million of full-time workers who used illicit drugs met criteria for dependence or abuse. 10.5 million were dependent on or abused alcohol.

One of the study's key findings relate to worker performance. 12.3 percent of drug users, compared to 5.1 percent of 'clean' workers, said they had worked for three or more employers in the past year. Furthermore, 16.4 percent of drug users, versus 11 percent of non users, reported missing two or more days of work in the past month.

"Employees who use drugs miss work more often, are less healthy and are more prone to harming themselves and others in the workplace," said John Walters, Director of National Drug Control Policy. "We hope that employers will take note of this report and consider implementing workplace drug testing policies that can help prevent drug use before it starts, help identify drug-using employees who need drug treatment services and also reduce employers' liability from drug-related workplace accidents," he said.

Some industries had more drug users than others. Food service workers reported the highest percentage of drug use, 17.4. Construction workers were second with 15.1 percent. The report did note that certain factors can influence why some industries have a higher percentage than others. For example, food industries tend to have more young workers because the job requires less experience and skills.

Heavy alcohol was highest in construction, mining, excavation and drilling workers (17.8 percent), and installation, maintenance, and repair workers (14.7 percent). "The high rates of drug and alcohol use in hazardous industries is cause for concern," said Elena Carr, drug policy coordinator at the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). "Clearly businesses can ill-afford the risk of having workers operating meat slicers, backhoes, or other dangerous equipment while under the influence of alcohol or drugs, which is one reason why DOL helps employers and employees work together to proactively prevent such safety hazards."

Florida Drug Screening offers a number of products and services that can help you implement and/or administer a Drug Free Workplace Program. We provide Drug Free Workplace programs for hundreds of companies nationwide who need or wish to implement them. Employers must know that those who do not provide drug testing for all applicants may end up hiring an illegal drug user. Drug-Free Workplace programs are available for companies of all sizes and industries, regardless of location.

For questions or additional information please call Florida Drug Screening at 1 888 441 4599

