

# Company Management to Prevent Employee Alcohol and Drug Abuse

September 22, 2006

This report gives information from the **Survey on Company Alcohol and Drug Abuse Policy** conducted in August-September 2006 with Encana subcontractors. The purposes of the survey were learning more about the policies subcontractors use to reduce substance abuse and to make recommendations for strengthening the best ideas available in all companies. The ultimate goals are increasing the likelihood that every Encana worksite will be drug-free and that employees will benefit from a healthy and safe working environment.

## The Survey

In August, approximately 500 persons were contacted by letter from Encana, asking those involved in Colorado operations to respond to a 12-question survey (either on paper or online). Surveys were anonymous and when completed went to an independent substance abuse treatment organization in Colorado who would analyze data and write this report.

Survey questions were developed from information prepared by the U. S. Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) on promoting drug-free workplaces.

## Survey Respondents

77 individuals responded to the survey. Most, 79.2% came from companies with 50 or fewer employees; however, 9.1% were in companies with 100 or more employees. Among those responding, 80.5% were company owners, officers, or employee supervisors. 39.0% worked side-by-side with employees in the field, 50.6% saw field employees at the worksite on a daily basis, and 10.4% saw employees face-to-face

only once a week or less often. In general, respondents were from smaller companies and were in close contact with their employees at Encana worksites.

## Survey Results: Subcontractors' Concerns with Alcohol and Drug Abuse

68.9% of subcontractors said that they were concerned that heavy drinking could occur among their company's workforce. At the same time, 61.1% expressed an equal concern that heavy drinking may be contributing to employee accidents. Further, 63.7% said the possibility that alcohol or other drug use could be reducing their company's productivity worried them. 66.3% said that methamphetamine's adverse effects on productivity and safety were a great concern. The level of these concerns were unrelated to company size, the frequency with which respondents were in direct contact with employees in the field, or whether they were in the "supervisory" group or an employee.

## Survey Results: Subcontractors' Policies on Alcohol and Drug Abuse

OSHA identifies five company policy components that can prevent and reduce alcohol and drug abuse (a written policy on alcohol and drugs, training for supervisors, employee education programs, direct assistance for affected employees, and drug testing). 74.0% of survey respondents reported having four or five of these components in place and operating in their companies. The total number of components in place was unrelated to company size or respondents' frequency of contact with employees in the field. Small companies were equally likely as large companies to have adopted multiple recom-

mended policies to prevent alcohol and substance abuse.

### **Survey Results: Subcontractors' Confidence in their Knowledge about Alcohol and Drug Abuse**

Policy and programs are critical to prevention; just as important is the level of knowledge about substance abuse so that supervisors and others can make informed, wise decisions about employees. Survey results showed that 89.7% felt they could recognize alcohol/drug effects if these were present in their employees, 74.1% felt confident with their knowledge about resources for professional services should an employee need assessment or treatment, and 74.1% said they felt their company was in reasonably good shape with meeting their goals for employee substance abuse prevention. Statistical analysis showed a tendency for persons from smaller companies to be less well informed, but there was no relationship with frequency of contact with persons in the field.

### **Survey Results: Subcontractors' Motivation to Take Action on Alcohol and Drug Abuse**

Policy, programs, and knowledge are necessary, but not sufficient for effective prevention. Motivation to take action when it is needed is also a key ingredient. Analysis of survey respondents showed that the greater a respondent's concern with the potential impact of employee substance abuse on the local community at-large, the stronger they felt about being proactive rather than reactive – letting problems come up and then handling them. A motivated, proactive stance with substance abuse was advocated by only 44.2% of subcontractor respondents.

### **Summary and Recommendations from the Survey**

Building on existing strengths among subcontractors has been this survey's approach to preventing and reducing alcohol and drug abuse at

Encana worksites. Before talking about recommendations, it is important to review a few conclusions:

- Most survey respondents, about four-in-five, were from companies of 50 or fewer employees—
- Half work face-to-face with their employees every day—
- Independently of company size, most, two-in-three, are concerned that substances could have an adverse effect on their operations, either through reduced productivity or accidents—
- Slightly more than one-in-four have insufficiently developed policies to prevent substance abuse and existing policy development is as good in small as large companies—
- About one-in-four have reservations about their knowledge of substance abuse itself. These doubts are as likely to occur in companies with a full complement of policies, but more often in smaller sized companies—
- Policy implementation and knowledge were high; however, these were not matched with the same level of dedicated motivation to action on preventing and reducing substance abuse. Motivation was related to subcontractor concern for the effects of employee substance abuse on nearby communities.

Review of these conclusions shows a surprising contrast between the level of respondents' development of policies, their knowledge, and even their motivation to take action – and the continuing high level of their concern about the potential for substance abuse to harm their company and its employees. It is as though respondents are saying, "We have done many of the things recommended to us, but we are still very concerned about the problem. Is this problem of employee substance abuse beyond our ability to control or do we need new ideas?" Policies and programs

are strong, but so is worry about the effects of substance abuse.

Perhaps, subcontractors feel that they have limited control over substance abuse and its harmful effects. If this perception is common, then more work must be done to strengthen the link between company action and actual, visible reduction of substance abuse risk. Four recommendations will accomplish this purpose:

1. First, it is essential that all subcontractors are informed about the best prevention ideas existing among companies working in Colorado. These ideas about policy, building a knowledge base, and keeping motivation high and constant should be assembled and distributed to all concerned persons.
2. It is important that successful case studies be compiled and distributed showing how substance abuse problems were identified, studied, policy action formulated and implemented, and the beneficial effects on problem solving. Subcontractors need locally relevant examples showing that their prevention work is not just an exercise but has tangible and valuable results in their company's interest.
3. For selected, high-priority problems, it is desirable to conduct a few pilot studies that objectively quantify a substance abuse issue, implement a promising action plan, and then measure the issue's standing again. Studies

like these among subcontractors with common interests will increase belief in their efforts made to reduce heavy drinking and drug use.

4. Subcontractor workshops and related educational materials can present the above information and work directly with supervisors in solving specific problems. The workshop may supply post-session technical assistance to guarantee that planning worked and the problem was resolved.

Repeating the **Survey on Company Alcohol and Drug Abuse Policy** will show whether these recommendations are paying off with both broader adoption of effective policy and rising confidence in control over substance abuse.

Employers have enormous power to improve the safety and health of their workplaces by integrating a drug-free component into their overall safety programs and OSHA research shows this component is a key to reducing on-the-job accidents and injuries. This report finds that there are two remaining tasks for Encana subcontractors, encouraging adoption of the best ideas from companies in the region and then demonstrating with managers and supervisors that their efforts do pay off for their company and for their employees.