

IMPACTS AND COSTS OF SUBSTANCE USE IN THE ALBERTA WORKPLACE

September 2003

Substance Use and Gambling in the Alberta Workplace, 2002: A Replication Study (AADAC, 2003) provided current information and trend data on substance use and gambling in the Alberta workplace as a follow-up to similar research done in 1992. While information about alcohol and illicit drugs was gathered in both 2002 and 1992, new data regarding gambling and tobacco were collected in 2002. Employees (2,836), employers (755) and union representatives (88) provided information about perceived impacts of substance use. It is important to note that employers and union representatives were in a better position than workers to be aware of these incidents.

Reported Incidents

Employers and union representatives were asked about substance use incidents on the job that had been brought to their attention in the past month. According to both the 2002 and 1992 studies, most workplace impacts of substance use tended to be subtle and pervasive such as absenteeism or slower work pace, rather than being highly visible or dramatic impacts. In fact, less than 1% of respondents reported that a worker had been injured because he or she was impaired on the job, a statistic that remained consistent over time.

TABLE 1: WORK RELATED INCIDENTS RESULTING FROM SUBSTANCE USE AND GAMBLING REPORTED BY EMPLOYERS AND UNION REPRESENTATIVES: 2002 AND 1992

EMPLOYEE/MEMBER INCIDENT	REPORTED AWARENESS OF INCIDENT IN PAST MONTH			
	Employers		Union Representatives	
	2002	1992	2002	1992
Arrived late for work due to alcohol/drug use	15%	19%	49%	31%
Missed a day of work due to alcohol/drug use	16%	19%	50%	40%
Work pace was slowed due to alcohol/drug use	10%	9%	23%	24%
Arrived late for work due to gambling	3%	N/A	13%	N/A
Missed a day of work due to gambling	2%	N/A	19%	N/A
Caught stealing from company/client due to gambling	1%	N/A	6%	N/A
Late for work or took too many breaks from work due to smoking	19%	N/A	N/A	N/A
Caught smoking on the job in a prohibited area	11%	N/A	N/A	N/A

In both the 2002 and 1992 studies, employers most frequently cited being aware of an employee missing a day of work, arriving late for work, and/or working at a slower pace, due to alcohol or drug use.

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In the 2002 study, very few employers reported awareness of an employee missing work or arriving late for work or of incidents in which an employee was caught stealing from the company or a client due to gambling. Employers were more likely to report that workers arrived late for work or took too many breaks due to smoking, and that they were caught smoking on the job in an area where smoking was not permitted. Union representatives were more likely than employers to report awareness of incidents in both 2002 and 1992.

Perceptions of Employers/Unions about Effects

When asked about the seriousness of employees’ gambling and use of alcohol, illicit drugs and tobacco as issues for their organization and industry, employers were more likely to identify employee tobacco use as a problem (followed by alcohol, illicit drugs then gambling) for both their organization and industry. However, these issues were more likely to be identified as concerns for the industry rather than the organization. Employer concerns about alcohol and illicit drug use have grown since 1992 for the organization but not for the industry.

TABLE 2: EMPLOYER PERCEPTIONS OF SERIOUSNESS OF EMPLOYEE TOBACCO USE, ALCOHOL USE, ILLICIT DRUG USE AND GAMBLING: 2002 AND 1992		
	EXTREMELY / MODERATELY SERIOUS	
	2002	1992
Employee Use in Organization		
Alcohol	20%	10%
Illicit Drugs	13%	7%
Tobacco	31%	N/A
Gambling	9%	N/A
Employee Use in Industry		
Alcohol	32%	36%
Illicit Drugs	18%	19%
Tobacco	36%	N/A
Gambling	14%	N/A

The most significant potential costs associated with employee substance use in the workplace were related to alcohol (\$51 million), followed by illicit drugs (\$16 million) and gambling (\$7 million). Costs for employee tobacco use were not measured. According to the study, the costs associated with employee-missed hours and lost productivity due to substance use and gambling was approximately four million hours and \$74 million dollars to the Alberta economy per year. This is a partial estimate only as a full costing lay beyond the scope of the 2002 study.