

Online Alcohol Screening Protects Workers' Identities

Privacy concerns can prevent people from seeking help with a possible alcohol problem, particularly in the workplace. But online alcohol screening programs can ease these privacy worries, opening the door to intervention and treatment and helping reduce healthcare costs for employers.

According to the Pew Internet and American Life Project, 80 percent of U.S. Internet users have searched online for information about major health topics. Of those, 8 percent have searched for information about problems with drugs or alcohol. These so-called "health seekers" are often looking for diagnostic tools and ways to connect to local health resources, and appreciate the anonymity afforded by the Internet.

Providing screening tools online can go a long way toward helping reduce healthcare expenses. It is estimated that healthcare costs for employees with alcohol problems are twice as high as for other employees, and each employee with an alcohol problem that's left untreated costs his or her employer an extra \$640 annually.

An Effective Tool: AlcoholScreening.org

Alcohol screening programs have been shown to be among the most effective tools for preventing alcohol abuse as well as addiction. "Given appropriate support and assistance, people who are not alcohol dependent may reduce or stop their consumption" as a result of screening, according to the U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs. This is particularly important given that 60 percent of alcohol-related absenteeism, tardiness, and poor work quality is caused by non-dependent drinkers -- those who drink lightly to moderately.

Too often, workplace screening programs for alcohol are conducted in person and are poorly attended. Low utilization rates may reflect fear among workers that their employers will punish those who are found to have a drinking problem. The desire for anonymity and the trend toward seeking health tools and information on the Internet prompted the creation of AlcoholScreening.org, a free public website created by Join Together. AlcoholScreening.org aims to help users understand how their drinking behavior may be affecting their health.

Since its launch during National Alcohol Awareness Month in 2001, AlcoholScreening.org has been visited by almost 600,000 people, who've completed nearly 300,000 screens.

In addition to a screening tool, AlcoholScreening.org provides information about a wide range of alcohol-related health topics, including alcohol consumption guidelines, how to cut down on drinking, and what to do if someone you know has a problem. The site's help section contains links to additional support resources and a searchable database of 11,000 local treatment programs.

The screening section of the site consists of 13 questions that are a modified version of the Alcohol Use Identification Test (AUDIT), which was created by the World Health Organization and is one of the most widely validated alcohol self-screening tools. Each user receives personalized feedback based on the brief-intervention model; in face-to-face situations, brief interventions have been shown to be highly effective: drinkers who receive a brief intervention are twice as likely to reduce their drinking as others.



A recent study published in the journal Preventive Medicine found that visitors to AlcoholScreening.org who had greater drinking-severity levels were much more likely to take the next step toward getting help, rather than simply learning more about the topic. Although no research on the effectiveness of brief interventions provided via Web-based feedback has yet been published, this study does indicate some level of influence on visitors to AlcoholScreening.org.

Providing a validated diagnostic tool via the Internet helps employees screen themselves confidentially and anonymously, either in the workplace or from the privacy of their homes. It also provides easy access to local resources and additional information on alcohol and health. Offering such a tool allows companies to reach employees who might otherwise not participate in screening programs.

Workplace prevention programs, including screening tools, significantly reduce costs through improved productivity and fewer injuries on and off the job. And it's been proven time and again that the general health of employees will rise if they are encouraged to use, and provided with, tools for change. For more information on creating or enhancing a drug-free workplace program, please call the DWI Resource Center at: (505) 881.1084.

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Report Shows Bars, Liquor Stores Linked to Neighborhood Violence

When bars, liquor stores and other businesses that sell alcohol are located close together in neighborhoods, more assaults and other violent crimes occur in those neighborhoods, according to a growing body of research examined in a newly released white paper. Government agencies can confront this problem through controlling liquor licenses and locations, setting minimum distances between outlets and closing outlets that repeatedly violate liquor laws.

The paper, entitled "How Alcohol Outlets Affect Neighborhood Violence," is available online at: <http://resources.prev.org/>



Methamphetamine Crystal, Institute for Intergovernmental Research

More Job Applicants Test Positive for Meth

Positive drug tests for amphetamines among job applicants and workers rose last year, with positive tests for methamphetamine rising 3 percent, CBS News reported. However, those increases were mild compared to 2003, when positive drug tests for all amphetamines rose 44 percent, and positive tests for methamphetamine rose 68 percent.

"The use of amphetamines among workers continued to grow," said Barry Sample, Director of Science and Technology at drug-testing firm Quest Diagnostics, Inc., which released the figures. "However amphetamine use among workers grew at a slower pace when compared to previous years."

Overall, positive drug tests for amphetamine use among current employees stayed level at 4.5 percent. Among the current employees who failed drug tests, 55 percent tested positive for marijuana, 15 percent for cocaine, and 10 percent for amphetamines.



The DWI Resource Center, Inc. is committed to reducing the social and economic impact of drunk driving in New Mexico through education, public awareness, prevention and research. The Center serves as a clearinghouse for DWI information and issues, providing community leaders with statistical information and analysis to assist them in creating localized plans to reduce DWI death and injury in New Mexico. Our key services and projects include:

- Drug-Free Workplace Program
- DWI Research & Analysis
- Public Policy & Law
- Victims' Rights Legal Assistance Project
- DWI Prevention Programs

The DWI Resource Center, Inc. is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. For more information about the Center or to make a contribution, please call us at (505) 881-1084, or visit our website at: www.dwiresourcecenter.org.

Nobel Prize Economists Oppose Legislation to Reduce Alcohol Taxes

Nearly sixty leading economists, including four Nobel Prize winners, have signed and presented to Congress a declaration supporting an increase in federal excise taxes on alcoholic beverages to help offset the massive economic and social costs of alcohol and discourage underage drinking.

The Economists' Declaration on Federal Alcohol Excise Taxes, organized by the Coalition for the Prevention of Alcohol Problems (CPAP), was prepared in opposition to several bills in Congress which propose reducing alcohol taxes.

Opponents claim the bills are special-interest legislation designed to support the liquor industry, and would damage public health, reduce federal revenue which could be used to help close the growing budget deficit, and make alcohol more accessible to young people.

"Through neglect, Congress has allowed effective rates of tax on a substance that does more harm than any illegal drug to fall dramatically, even as the federal budget has sunk far into the red," said Henry Aaron, senior fellow in economic studies at the Brookings Institution. "As our elected officials deliberate on how to deal with our fiscal woes, they would be well advised to increase a tax that would both help close the federal deficit and discourage the continued epidemic of alcohol abuse."

Federal taxes on alcohol have increased only once in 54 years for beer and wine, and only twice for liquor. In addition, reducing alcohol taxes makes alcoholic beverages more affordable for youth. According to Stacia Murphy, president of the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, the total cost of alcohol use by youth alone exceeds \$58 billion per year.

More information on the economist's declaration and the pending legislation in Congress can be found online at: www.cspinet.org/new/200505161.html.

New CDC Report Says More Americans Driving Under Influence

A new national CDC study suggests that more Americans may be driving under the influence of alcohol. Researchers from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said that after years of small but steady declines, reports of impaired driving rose 37 percent between 1997 and 1999. Moreover, binge drinkers were 13 times more likely to report having driven impaired than others surveyed.

Recommended steps to address the problem included lowering blood-alcohol limits, faster suspensions for DUI offenders, more sobriety checkpoints, and more use of ignition-interlock devices to prevent alcohol-using drivers from starting their cars. The report appears in the May 2005 issue of the American Journal of Preventive Medicine.

New Ranking of Industry-Based Problem Drinking Shows Construction and Mining At Number One

The construction and mining fields have the highest percentage of problem drinkers, with nearly one in seven workers having serious alcohol problems, according to a new ranking of industry-based problem drinking patterns released by Ensuring Solutions to Alcohol Problems at The George Washington University Medical Center.

Likely Number of Problem Drinkers by Industry (per 1,000 Employees)

1. Construction and Mining: 135
2. Wholesale: 115
3. Retail: 114
4. Leisure and Hospitality: 109
5. Business and Repair Services: 106
6. Agriculture: 106
7. Transportation and Utilities: 96
8. Finance and Real Estate: 92
9. Manufacturing: 90
10. Government: 69
11. Professional: 54

U.S. Average: 91

Source: Alcohol Cost Calculator for Business, Ensuring Solutions to Alcohol Problems, 2005.

"Employees with alcohol problems are not likely to leave those problems behind when they come to work, and no business can afford to risk workplace safety by simply hoping they will," said Elena Carr, director of the U.S. Labor Department's Working Partners for an Alcohol- and Drug-Free Workplace (Working Partners) program, in response to the release of the new rankings. "Smart employers take steps to protect their business by educating their employees about the dangers of alcohol abuse and encouraging those with problems to seek help before it affects the safety of all. Working Partners is committed to helping employers establish programs to prevent workplace substance abuse."

The rankings, which evaluate the prevalence of problem drinking in 11 industries, are based on the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, an annual report produced by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The rankings are computed using the Alcohol Cost Calculator for Business, a proprietary tool created by Ensuring Solutions.

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