

Case Study

Marriot Has No Reservations Over Its Drug-Free Workplace Program

Marriott Hotel Resorts Suites (MHRS), a division of the hospitality industry giant, Marriott International, makes no reservations about insisting on a drug-free workplace. Marriott's substance abuse policy includes pre-employment testing, support, and referral information tailored for use by its member hotels, based on their specific needs.

The policy, in place for more than three years, has yielded impressive results, according to Jeff Hayes, MHRS Division Director of Assets Protection at Marriott's Corporate Headquarters in Washington, D.C. Hayes attributes the program's success in large part to pre-employment testing which has helped to decrease turnover and reduce accidents.

However, these results didn't happen overnight.

"One thing I have discovered in doing this over the years is that good results come with time. As your drug-testing program matures, hidden benefits emerge. A stable, contributing work force in a healthy work environment consistently delivers quality service to customers and each other," Hayes explained.

MHRS provides individual hotel general managers numerous options in implementing substance abuse programs to fit their local needs. Some Marriott hotels have enacted formal employee assistance programs (EAPs) and referral services, others rely on public sector referrals and some have included testing as part of their program. MHRS provides member hotels with a general information packet about employee substance abuse, offers evaluation services, provides a list of government certified laboratories, helps

hotels identify the best laboratory service providers for them, and supports their implementation process.

Bryon Peterson, Director of Human Resources for the Chicago Downtown Marriott Hotel, has experienced first-hand the benefits of promoting a drug-free workplace. In addition to conducting pre-employment drug testing of all applicants, the hotel refers associates with drug or alcohol problems to nearby rehabilitation programs. But it is the hotel's enthusiastic promotion of a drug-free workplace that he credits for attracting and keeping quality workers.

"We think the best result of our policy is the quality of applicant we are getting," says Peterson. "We advertise our positions so well that the chance of hiring an associate with a drug problem is self-limiting."

A big sign in Spanish and English declaring "All Applicants at this Hotel are Subject to Drug Testing Prior to Employment" greets potential associates when they come through the door. The drug-free workplace message is reiterated during the interview process and appears again in newspaper job advertisements the hotel places.

An important goal of the hotel's focus on a drug-free workplace is the reduction of accidents and safety-compromising behavior. Accidents have been a growing problem for Chicago Downtown, as for the hospitality industry in general. Hotels that have introduced substance abuse programs have seen dramatic declines in their accident rates.

"It almost always begins as a tardiness issue," says Peterson, who believes the signs are usually clear when an associate is abusing drugs or alcohol. "Tardiness progresses to absenteeism and then to a combination of both. By the time you are forced to acknowledge these irritating job performance problems, the substance abuse has been going on for some time."

When these problems surface, the management meets with the employee and refers him or her to a counselor for evaluation and treatment recommendation. Associates who undergo rehabilitation for drug or alcohol abuse may return to work under the provisions of their prescribed treatment. If the assessment includes out-patient care, the hotel will adjust work schedules to accommodate it. If the associate must enroll in a detoxification program, the hotel will provide an extended leave of absence for its completion.

Supporting employees in getting help for their substance abuse problem is also the cost-effective thing to do, according to Peterson. "Business is interested in business," he says. "Because it costs us a substantial amount to hire, train, and sever someone's employment, allowing an associate to recover from drug or alcohol abuse saves us the cost of hiring someone else who might also turn out to have a substance abuse problem."

Peterson says the hoped-for return on this investment is a better and more loyal worker, which has been the case with several reformed substance abusers still employed by the hotel. One problem associate who recently completed a month-long alcohol program before returning to work now "comes to work on time, is a good worker, and is extremely grateful to have his job and self-esteem back," according to Peterson. "I really believe our honest approach results in a win-win situation for everyone."

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Last State Adopts .08, U.S. Has Uniform Standard for Drunk Driving

With Minnesota's adoption on August 1 of the .08 blood-alcohol level for legal intoxication, the United States at last has a uniform standard in all 50 states for establishing drunk driving.

"It's taken a long time, but at least we can all be glad that we finally have this sensible national level," said John Moulden, former president of the National Commission Against Drunk Driving.

Some prosecutors in Minnesota expect to see an immediate impact from the new law in the form of more convictions for repeat offenses, which they say will occur faster because of the stricter standard.

However, although U.S. alcohol-related highway deaths have declined, and laws have gotten tougher, compared to most other nations the U.S. still lags behind enforcement efforts in other nations.

The U.S. standard for impairment, .08 percent, pales in comparison to Sweden's, which is .02 percent and means that drivers who drink a single beer, shot, or glass of wine face arrest. Australia and at least 10 European nations set their BAC level at .05 percent. In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, the standard is zero percent. In Japan, the standard is .03 percent, but police can make arrests for any detectable level of alcohol.

Drugs Limit Oil Workforce, Only One In Four Pass Test

North Dakota's Oil and Gas Division has immediate openings for 250 oil rig workers, but are facing a labor shortage because only one in four workers are able to pass the pre-employment drug test, according to a July 6 article by the Associated Press.

Lynn Helms, director of North Dakota's Oil and Gas Division, estimated that at least 10 more rigs could be operating if crews were available who could pass the drug test. Because the job involves hard physical labor, positions tend to be filled by young men who are attracted to the entry-level salary which runs as high as \$25 per hour. Unfortunately, it is also this age group who are most likely to test positive for drug use.

New Mexico Requires Ignition Locks For All DWI Offenders

First-time drunk-driving offenders in New Mexico will be required to install ignition-interlock devices in their cars to prevent them from driving under the influence of alcohol again. The new law is the toughest in the nation; most other states only mandate the use of the devices -- which require drivers to blow into a breath-alcohol testing device in order to start their car -- for repeat offenders.

First-time offenders in New Mexico will be required to install the devices on their car for a year. Under the new law, anyone convicted of four drunk-driving offenses will have to keep the device on their car for the rest of their lives. An ignition-interlock device costs offenders about \$1,000 per year.

About The DWI Resource Center

The DWI Resource Center, Inc. is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization committed to reducing the social and economic impact of drunk driving in New Mexico through education, public awareness, prevention and research. TheOur key services and projects include:

Research and Statistics
Public Policy & Law
Victims' Rights Legal Assistance Project
Court Monitoring
Drug-Free Workplace Programs
Retailers For Responsibility
Victim Impact Panels

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.

Vermont Bar Sued Over Binge Death

Two Vermont bars are being sued over a 2003 incident in which a teenager died after downing 19 drinks in less than four hours. The youth's drinking companion also is named in the lawsuit, the Boston Herald reported.

Donna Carleton is suing Sidelines and the defunct Cadeleros in Rutland, saying the bars kept serving her son, Barry Ellison, even though he was visibly intoxicated. Ellison's friend, Vincent Donnelly, also is being sued under a Vermont law that bans serving alcohol to someone who is drunk.

Ellison was served 17 beers and liquor shots at the two bars before returning to Donnelly's mother's house and having two more drinks. Ellison then passed out; when brought to the hospital 13 hours later, his blood-alcohol level was still 0.104 percent. He never regained consciousness and died in a hospital 20 days later.

Busch Boating Ads Pulled After Accident

Brewer Anheuser-Busch took down billboard beer ads featuring a model on a personal watercraft after a deadly alcohol-related crash on Oregon's Columbia River, the Oregonian reported July 27.

The ads, which showed a man on a water scooter crashing through a wave over a Bud Light bottle and the slogan "Get in Your Element," were taken down after complaints from the anti-drug Oregon Partnership and the bloody weekend accident that killed Jacob Arndt, 24. Arndt was thrown from a speeding boat, caught under the prop, and killed; beer cans were found in the boat and on a beach where Arndt and friends had spent the afternoon.

Oregon Partnership spokesperson Bill Deiz said the Bud Light ads sent the message that, "Hey, alcohol and boating somehow go together." Anheuser-Busch released a statement saying the ads were "appropriate as it relates to the active lifestyle of Bud Light drinkers," but added that "in light of the recent boating tragedy, we will be joining with the Portland community in promoting water safety."

The company is putting up new billboards depicting a young woman getting a tan on a boat with the caption: "Play It Safe on the Water. Designate a Driver."

Half to two-thirds of boating fatalities in the U.S. involve alcohol.

U.S. Alcohol-Related Highway Deaths Decrease, Still Behind Other Nations

The federal government has reported a decrease in the number of alcohol-related traffic fatalities for the second consecutive year. Safety experts are attributing the downward trend to a uniform blood alcohol standard for drunk driving and to law enforcement's increased use of sobriety checkpoints.

The Associated Press reported August 2 that alcohol-related deaths on U.S. highways declined by 2.4 percent, from 17,105 in 2003 to 16,694 in 2004. Overall traffic deaths were at 42,636 last year, down 0.6 percent from 2003, according to data from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. According to the government report, traffic fatalities involving someone with a blood alcohol level of .08 or higher decreased by 1.8 percent in 2004.

In New Mexico, alcohol-related fatalities increased from 214 in 2003 to 219 in 2004. Alcohol-related injuries decreased slightly from 2,812 in 2003 to 2,576 in 2004.

Some articles in this newsletter are provided by Join Together Online, at <http://www.jointogether.org>

Albuquerque Businesses Join the Fight Against DWI

Many Albuquerque businesses have joined the fight to reduce DWI death and injury by joining the DWI Resource Center's Alcohol & Drug-Free Workplace Program. Funded by a grant from the City of Albuquerque, the program provides Alcohol & Drug-Free Workplace Program services at no charge to Albuquerque employers.

"We are pleased with the response by local businesses," said Linda Atkinson, Executive Director of the DWI Resource Center. "These companies recognize that by establishing drug-free workplace policies, they not only increase workplace safety, reduce liability and improve profitability, they also help our community reduce drunk driving by promoting socially responsible behavior in and out of the workplace."

Atkinson says that many companies who contact the Center already have existing drug-free workplace programs and want information on additional services, while others are building an entirely new program. Several companies have also taken advantage of the Center's free DWI screening service, where companies can submit employee information to the Center and receive a confidential report detailing any employees who have DWI citations and convictions. This service is particularly useful for companies who employ drivers or delivery personnel.

Companies who recently joined the program include:

Academy Backflow Prevention
Air Pro
Casework Technologies
CEI Enterprises
Gecko's Bar & Tapas
Mannie's Central Avenue Restaurant
Misty's Hideaway
San Bar Construction
Sidelines Bar & Grill

The DWI Resource Center's Alcohol & Drug-Free Workplace Program is designed to address alcohol and drug abuse in small to mid-size businesses in high-risk industries. As part of the Alcohol & Drug-Free Workplace Program, the Center provides Albuquerque businesses with a number of free services, including risk assessment, policy development and review, employee education, supervisor training, employee DWI conviction screening, program implementation and evaluation, and promotional materials. In addition, the Center also provides referral services for drug-testing facilities and employee assistance programs.

If you would like more information about the program and services, call the DWI Resource Center at (505) 881-1084.