

Sundance Mechanical's Alcohol & Drug-Free Workplace Policies Shine

George "Ed" Burroughs still remembers the old days in the construction industry when men were men and they all drank on the job.

"Forty or fifty years ago, I worked on a highway department job between Alamogordo and Calamazozo," recalls Burroughs, who started his career half a century ago as surveyor for the Army Corps of Engineers, and in 1965 became a construction superintendent overseeing a variety of civil engineering projects around New Mexico. "One day, the chief inspector was coming down from Santa Fe to view the progress on the road, so we gave the supervisor a bottle of whiskey and put him in a box culvert and left him there. The inspection went fine, but we forgot about the guy. When we finally went back to get him, he was just crawling out of the box culvert, still completely drunk."

As the current Safety Coordinator for Sundance Mechanical & Utility Corporation, Burroughs certainly doesn't call those the "good" old days. He does, however, remember a time when a "drug-free workplace" was almost unheard of, especially in the construction industry. Now, Burroughs says, a drug-free workplace is a business necessity.

Founded in 1979, Sundance Mechanical was one of the first construction companies to establish a drug and alcohol-free workplace and begin pre-employment drug testing. Michael Gonzales, Vice President of Sundance's mechanical engineering division, has been with the company since its inception.

"When we first started drug-testing in the early 1980s, there were a lot of applicants who couldn't pass," Gonzales said, laughing. "Now it's very rare to have an applicant who can't pass the drug test. The construction industry has changed a lot in 20 years, and we've created a safety-centered culture here at Sundance."

Key to that culture is Burroughs, who joined the company in 1989 as a project manager and moved into the Safety Coordinator position in 1993. At that time, Burroughs was 67 years old and working half time at Sundance.

"The previous safety coordinator ran over a flower seller and left the scene of the accident," Burroughs said, his voice conveying none of the irony surrounding his job change. "After a month without a safety coordinator, Mike called me and asked me to take the position."

Under the guidance of both Burroughs and company founder Mike Mechenbier, Sundance developed a reputation as one of the safest places to work in the state, receiving the Construction Users Roundtable National Safety Award and the STEP Award from the Associated Builders and Contractors.

Burroughs says Sundance owes this success to a comprehensive safety program, and that a key component of the program is the company's drug-free workplace policy.

"Some of our work is pretty dangerous, and we can't have anyone who is impaired on the job. Everyone who works here needs to be in good physical condition," Burroughs said. "Since we started the safety program, we don't have much of a problem with alcohol anymore."

Sundance has a zero-tolerance drug and alcohol policy, and conducts both pre-employment and post-accident drug testing. Existing employees who are found to have a drug problem are fired, but they are also given the opportunity to be re-hired after successful drug or alcohol treatment.

"We can't just turn our employees loose and tell them to fend for themselves. As an employer, we have a responsibility for these people. But in return, they have a responsibility to come to work clean," Burroughs said. "If they want their job back, we put the monkey on their back to stay clean. We refer them to a variety of programs, but the employee pays for their own treatment. When they return to work, we test at our expense during their one year probation. We've saved several employees this way.

"Most of the employees who have tested positive for drugs are occasional users of recreational drugs. We rarely see the serious drug or alcohol abuser," Burroughs continued. "We're a very desirable place to work, and you'd be surprised how many people want their job back. We don't offer any unusual benefits, but we have communication and camaraderie that you don't see in other places."

It is precisely this corporate culture of open communication, responsibility, and commitment to safety which has helped Burroughs reduce his workers' compensation insurance premiums by more than \$250,000 per year.

Burroughs incorporates his drug-free workplace policy into a larger safety program in a variety of ways, including training supervisors to recognize substance abuse, inviting guest speakers to safety meetings to talk about the dangers of alcohol and drug use, posting drug-free workplace material around the business, and promoting safe holiday activities. In addition, his overall safety program transfers accountability to individual supervisors, requires goals, keeps score, and doles out bonuses based on success. However, the process wasn't always easy.

"It was hell," Burroughs laughed. "No one wanted any part of it, and they fought and fought. But Mike persisted and went forward despite their objections. No one was penalized in the first year because it was too hard and we didn't have the guts to do it. But once we started enforcing the program, we started seeing results. Accountability has created a culture of acceptance."

For more information about starting a drug-free workplace program or complimenting your existing program, please contact the DWI Resource Center at (505) 881-1084, or visit us online at www.dwiresourcecenter.org.

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NY Drivers License Designed to Prevent Underage Drinking

New York has unveiled a new driver's license that uses a variety of technologies to prevent forgery and underage drinking. The new licenses include an "optical variable device" that creates a wavy line across the face of the license, which seemingly floats above the text and driver's photo. Under the state's "Operation Prevent," drivers under age 25 will be the first to receive the new licenses.

"The state-of-the-art features included in the redesigned license will greatly improve the ability of law enforcement to keep motorists safe, but also help combat the serious problem of underage drinking that often results in tragic consequences," said New York Gov. George Pataki. "Just as important, these anti-fraud measures will significantly thwart the ability of those who seek to use fraudulent identification to foster terrorism, break the law and cause harm."

The licenses will use a special laminate that will more easily reveal alterations when viewed under a black light, and will have "under 21" printed in red ink for all drivers under the legal drinking limit. The licenses also will feature prismatic ink, complex patterns that defeat attempts to photocopy, and a barcode that includes all of the information on the front of the license.

Rhode Island Gets Low Marks on DWI Laws

The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety has ranked Rhode Island last in the nation for its laws against drunk driving, the Providence Journal reported.

The nation's smallest state was rated "poor" based on a ranking that judged states based on their adoption of certain model laws,

including penalties for refusing to take a blood-alcohol test and allowing roadside sobriety checks. Rhode Island was faulted for failing to pass either of those laws, which the Institute contends have been proven to reduce drunk driving.

Rhode Island had the nation's highest proportion of alcohol-related fatalities in 2003, as well as in 2002 and 2001.

WalMart Makes Liquor Deal With Diageo, Creates Double Standard

Seeking to boost its sales of hard liquor, Wal-Mart has partnered with industry giant Diageo PLC and plans to triple the shelf space it now devotes to spirits, the Wall Street Journal reported.

Disturbed by liquor sales that have run at just 20 percent of target levels, Wal-Mart officials have partnered with Diageo to develop new merchandise and products and are expected to bring their low-price philosophy to bear on the rather insular and traditional liquor retailing business.

In addition to the web of state and local liquor control laws which pose a challenge to the international retailer, Wal-Mart may be creating a double standard between its corporate culture and its alcohol sales policy. Wal-Mart currently bans alcohol at its headquarters and at employee events, doesn't allow managers to charge alcohol to the company as part of expense accounts, and has faced resistance to liquor sales from stores in some communities.

UK Officials Choke on Kids Beer

A Japanese company wants to export "Kids' Beer," a soft drink with a frothy head that's packaged in dark brown bottles and marketed to children who "want to be a bit like an adult," the Telegraph reported.

Kids' Beer is nonalcoholic, but the marketing and packaging of the product makes clear that this is a drink for young people who want to use alcohol. "Even kids cannot stand life unless they have a drink," says one label slogan. Another reads: "For you who cannot drink, a bubbly head that you will like and a fizzy flavor that spreads refreshment through your body -- perfect for those evenings when you want to be a bit like an adult."

Satoshi Tomoda, president of Tomomasu, said the plan is to export Kids' Beer to Great Britain and Europe, an idea that horrifies U.K. opposition leader Tim Loughton. "This product would be an alarming development for a nation which is already succumbing to a binge-drinking culture," he said. "If manufacturers encourage children to have a dry-run for drinking, it will only train children to experiment with real alcohol even earlier."

The Portman Group, which promotes responsible drinking, also criticized Kids' Beer. "The way this drink is promoted, showing young people absolutely desperate for a drink, risks fostering harmful attitudes. Children need better education about alcohol, but this is not the way for them to learn," a spokesperson said. However, the British Soft Drinks Association said the product should be allowed in the U.K. as long as the marketing is more sensitive.

Doctors Cry Foul As British Government Considers 24-Hour Bars

A plan by the British government to allow bars to stay open around the clock is being slammed by prominent physicians, who warn of future health problems for young drinkers.

The BBC reported that Ian Gilmore and Kieran Moriarity of the Royal College of Physicians called the government's alcohol liberalization plan "insane."

"Worldwide research shows that levels of consumption are heavily increased by price and availability. An increase in hours of sale is likely to be associated with a rise rather than a fall in alcohol consumption," said Gilmore, who also warned that the plan would ultimately lead to more liver disease and other alcohol-related health problems.

The U.K.'s Department for Culture, Media and Sport defended the plan, intended to prevent violence that typically occurs at pub closing times. "We share doctors' concerns about the rise in drinking-related disease among young people," a spokesperson for the agency said. "That's why the Licensing Act increases police powers to deal with businesses that serve alcohol to underage drinkers."

DWI About Us

Resource Center, Inc.

The DWI Resource Center is a tax-exempt 501(c)3 New Mexico organization formed to reduce the social and economic impact of DWI through public awareness, education, prevention programs and research. The Center also provides assistance to victims and serves as a central clearinghouse for information on DWI and victims' rights.

- 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

Marin Institute Issues A Call To Action

The Marin Institute, California's alcohol industry watchdog, has issued an action alert against J.C. Penney's stores for their use of young models who wear clothing promoting alcohol.

Citing recent JC Penney's catalogs for back-to-school clothes and accessories in recent Sunday newspapers, the Marin Institute says J.C. Penney's is featuring T-shirts decorated with logos for Jack Daniels, Budweiser, Miller Lite and Guinness. They say the moderately priced shirts are described as "men's novelty tees," but they appear on the same pages with "young men's, boys' and girls'" fashions and are worn by models who appear to be approximately high school age. The Marin Institute is calling on consumers to visit their local J.C. Penney's, Target or other clothing store and share their concerns about promoting alcohol to underage youth with the store's manager.

Pennsylvania Alcoholic Back On The Road, With Conditions

Keith Emerich, the Lebanon, Penn., man who lost his driver's license after telling his doctor he drinks 10 beers a day, is being allowed to drive again -- as long as he installs a blood-alcohol measuring device in his car, the Philadelphia Inquirer reported.

"Just think of the stigma that's going to put on me, blowing into some tube just to start your car," said Emerich, 44. "This is how I'm being treated, like some common criminal. And all I did was go to the doctor."

Emerich had his license suspended by the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDot), after he went to Good Samaritan Hospital in Lebanon for an irregular heartbeat. When a physician inquired about his alcohol use, Emerich reported drinking six to 10 beers day. The doctor told Emerich that the alcohol was damaging his heart.

Two months later, Emerich received a letter notifying him that his license was being revoked based on the doctor's judgment that he has a drinking problem. Under Pennsylvania law, physicians are required to report drivers with medical conditions that could be potentially dangerous. Alcohol misuse is on the list of dangerous medical conditions.

Lebanon County Judge Bradford Charles supported PennDot's action and ordered Emerich to install the ignition interlock device, a breath test for alcohol that must register below 0.025 percent for the car will start.