

# Project 2.1: Safety impacts of alcohol and other drugs in construction

**Website launch for Project 2.1  
Swinburne University  
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# Background



- Estimated 638,400 persons suffered a work-related injury or illness in 2009-2010 and 337 lost their lives as a result in 2009-2010. In 2013-2014, there were 186 fatalities with 29 (16%) occurring in construction.
- Very little is known about what proportion of accidents are directly attributable to the effects of AOD
- Anecdotal evidence highlights issues of AOD and its association with safety risk on construction sites

# Research Objective

- To scientifically evaluate the relationship between the use of AOD and the safety impacts within the Australian construction industry to engender a cultural change in the workforce
- A nationally consistent and collaborative approach involving government, employers and employees, unions and other key industry stakeholders

# AOD in the workplace today?

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Consideration of AODs in the workplace pertinent for a number of reasons:

- In addition to the personal and social costs, the economic costs are substantial: estimated \$5.2 billion in lost productivity costs due to AOD use July 2005 to June 2006
- Potential dangers well documented with links to absenteeism, interpersonal problems, poor job performance and productivity
- Impaired coordination, judgement and hazard perception
- Increased staff turnover, increased lateness for work, machinery damage and litigation costs

# AOD in the workplace today?

- The prevalence, patterns and nature of AOD consumption in the workplace are not reliably or accurately understood
  - Limited and inconclusive evidence
    - Methodological issues
    - Extrapolation of AOD use by employed individuals to the use of AODs and *impairment* in the workplace
    - Paucity of data
- Such limitations have clear implications for the development of effective programs and highlight the need to gather accurate and reliable data

# Australian construction industry

- High risk, dynamic and ever changing
  - Subcontractors working multi-site
- Currently governed by state-based OHS legislation
  - 'Duty of care'
  - AOD management not prescribed
- Organisational safety culture
  - Extrinsic vs. intrinsic pathways
  - Construction industry relies heavily on an educative approach built around intrinsic motivation

No clear evidence on the prevalence and risk of AOD use among Australian construction workers

# Method

- Led by an Academic Project Leader in partnership with an Industry Project Leader from a major Australian construction company
- Close collaboration with academic leaders and experts in the area, from around Australia
- Guided strategically by an Industry Steering Committee with membership comprising representatives from key government, industry and union groups

# Industry Steering Committee

Australian Constructors Association

Australian Procurement and Construction Council

Australian Workers Union

Austrroads

Civil Contractors Federation

Construction, Forestry, Mining, and Energy Union

Engineers Australia

John Holland

Master Builders Australia

Office of the Federal Safety Commissioner





# Method

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## 1. *Drugs and alcohol consumption and behaviour assessment*

- National qualitative and quantitative assessment of the use of AODs in the industry
- Headquarters and operational site visits around Australia
  - Survey using WHO AUDIT (Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test) customised with key stakeholders
    - Approx 500 employees
  - Structured interviews/focus groups with management and employees, to supplement survey data
    - Approx 20 interviewees

# Method

## *2. Development of an appropriate industry policy*

- Just culture, non-punitive and rehabilitative approach will be developed in consultation with employers, employees and unions across the industry
- Aim that it be adopted nationally

# Method

## *3. Development of an implementation plan*

- Educative in focus with a range of comprehensive stepped interventions to be used by workplaces
- Web-based delivery of program to aid face-to-face
- Clear recommendations for industry
- Partnerships with industry education and skills organisations to disseminate outcomes

# Results: Survey

- Based on the completion of 494 surveys in 3 states
- Majority male, mean age = 36 years
- Survey distributed across all roles within the company with most classifying themselves as a tradesperson (31%) or a labourer (24%)
- Of a possible maximum cumulative score of 40, participants recorded a mean score of 9.98. Scores ranged from 0 to 40 with a median score of 9
- Total of 286 participants (58%) scored above the cut-off cumulative score for hazardous alcohol use of  $\geq 8$
- Total of 43 participants (15%) scored  $\geq 20$  = significantly “at risk”

# Results: Survey

- 33 participants reported that they either possibly or definitely had a problem with drinking. A further 19 were unsure
- Over the next 3 months, 71 participants reported that it would be either fairly difficult or very difficult to cut down or stop drinking
- 292 (59%) had used cannabis – 46 (16%) in the last year
- 196 (40%) had used ecstasy/meth type substances – 62 (32%) in the last year

# Results: Interviews



- Support for the need for further educational initiatives
- Suggestions for effective communication of AOD education at tool box talks i.e. clear 'visual' hard copy brochures or posters, videos + positive feedback towards a web-based resource
- Lack of knowledge surrounding the physical effects of AOD; with clear implications for safety – despite the attitude that AOD use is detrimental to workplace productivity, safety and the risks that it may pose both for one's self and co-workers

# Results: Interviews

- Importance of management commitment to AOD and the consistent communication of policies
- Ensuring that contractors are made aware of the same policies and practices that employees are subject to in their regular pre-start and tool box talks
- Job security highlighted as a common fear when it comes to seeking help or advice at work about AOD

# Results: Interviews

- Educating younger employees about how to cope with the 'lifestyle' that can accompany a high-salary, project-to-project, transient type job and 'getting in before having to deal with the aftermath'
- The idea of a 'mentoring' type initiative was suggested as one way of contributing towards this education
- Access to a web based information and assistance service for AOD issues was seen as valuable



# Conclusions

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- No known study has scientifically examined the strength of the relationship between the use of AODs and safety impacts in the construction industry
- Support for the need for more comprehensive educational initiatives for the construction workforce
- This research will contribute to a cultural change towards improving internal safety culture across the workforce, using a nationally consistent and collaborative approach

# Conclusions

- Anticipated reductions in economic, health and social costs associated with injuries to workers and their families, with outcome applicability for other sectors
- Of major significance for Australia within the context of harmonisation of industrial legislation in OHS and Federal and State Government investment in improving workplace safety and overall population health