

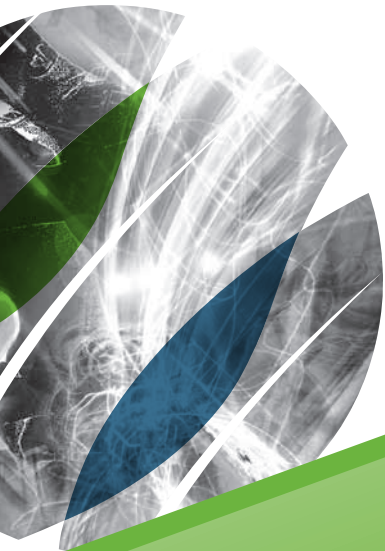
Safety Impacts

of Alcohol & Other
Drugs in Construction

Project Update
May 2012



Sustainable
Built Environment
National Research Centre



The Sustainable Built Environment National Research Centre (SBENrc)

is the successor to Australia's CRC for *Construction Innovation*. Established on 1 January 2010, the SBENrc is a key research broker between industry, government and research organisations servicing the built environment industry.

The SBENrc is continuing to build an enduring value-adding national research and development centre in sustainable infrastructure and building with significant support from public and private partners around Australia and internationally.

Benefits from SBENrc activities are realised through national, industry and firm-level competitive advantages; market premiums through engagement in the collaborative research and development process; and early adoption of Centre outputs. The Centre integrates research across the environmental, social and economic sustainability areas in programs respectively titled Greening the Built Environment; People, Processes and Performance; and Driving Productivity through Innovation.

Among the SBENrc's objectives is to collaborate across organisational, state and national boundaries to develop a strong and enduring network of built environment research stakeholders through collaborative industry research teams.

About this project

Safety Impacts of Alcohol and Other Drugs in Construction

Safety performance is a challenge for everyone in Australia's construction industry. We have an obligation to ensure the safety of workers, the public, suppliers and other participants in the construction process.

The Sustainable Built Environment National Research Centre (SBENrc), together with lead industry partner John Holland, is conducting research into safety with a two-year study into the safety impacts of alcohol and other drugs in construction. The ultimate aim of this project is to make construction sites safer by reducing the risk of impaired performance caused by drug and alcohol use.

Anecdotally we know that construction workers are one of the highest at-risk industry groups, but the impact of drug and alcohol use has never been evaluated in the safety context for Australian infrastructure and building construction.

This project will examine the extent of the problem on construction sites by undertaking a national assessment of drug and alcohol consumption and behaviour. The key outcome of the project will be the development of an education and rehabilitation approach to dealing with the issue, to be created in consultation with employers and employees across the country.

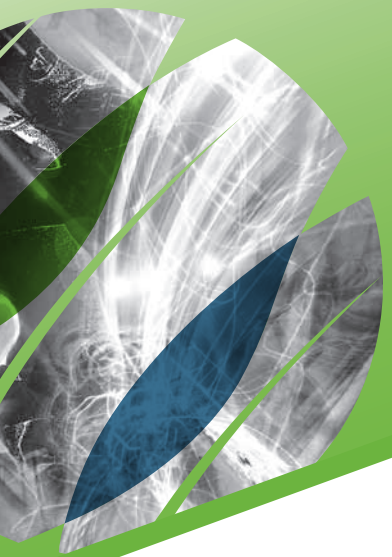
The challenge is to build safer workplaces through working together on this key national

project. The project is being led by an Industry Steering Committee chaired by Nick Stump, former CEO of Mount Isa Mines (MIM) and a member of the John Holland Board with Project Leaders Associate Professor Bert Biggs from QUT (Research Project Leader) and Lea Slade, Regional Safety Manager, Northern Region, John Holland (Industry Project Leader).

Membership of the National Steering Committee comprises representatives from:

- Australian Constructors Association
- Australian Procurement and Construction Council
- Australian Workers Union
- Austroads
- Civil Contractors Federation
- Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union
- Engineers Australia
- Master Builders Australia
- Office of the Federal Safety Commissioner

This project builds on the reputation and networks developed through the CRC for Construction Innovation's (predecessor to the SBENrc) landmark achievements in safety including the Construction Safety Competency Framework (2006), Guide to Best Practice for Safer Construction (2007) and the Safety Effectiveness Indicators (2009).



Project outcomes

This project will fundamentally contribute to a greater understanding of the impact of alcohol and other drugs in the Australian infrastructure and building industry. Critically, this will bring together the employer, employee, and industry representative groups nationally. Never before has this level of collaboration been possible at a national level. This will be achieved through a three-step process:

Project steps	Outcomes
1. Drugs and alcohol consumption and behaviour assessment	A national qualitative and quantitative assessment of the use of drugs and alcohol within the industry. Standardised measures for substance use and risk behaviours will be used, following consultation with key stakeholders. This will build upon similar studies carried out in the Australian energy and mining sectors.
2. Development of an appropriate industry policy	This will adopt a non-punitive and rehabilitative approach developed in consultation with employers and employees across the infrastructure and building sectors, with the aim it be applied nationally for adoption at the construction workplace.
3. Development of a cultural change management program	Together with the Office of the Federal Safety Commissioner, lead industry associations and key stakeholder groups, the SBEnrc will initiate an industry-wide collaborative approach to reducing the risk of impaired performance on construction sites and increasing workers' commitment to drugs and alcohol safety.

Step 1 Drugs and alcohol consumption and behaviour assessment

The data collection phase of the project is now complete. It included the face-to-face distribution of a survey and semi-structured interviews. All survey and interview responses were anonymous. The ultimate goal is to improve the safety of our workers, which is why the research team was keen to collect better information around the issue of alcohol and other drugs. We can now inform ways to prevent their inappropriate use through more effective education.

The widely used World Health Organisation Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT) was included as part of the survey.

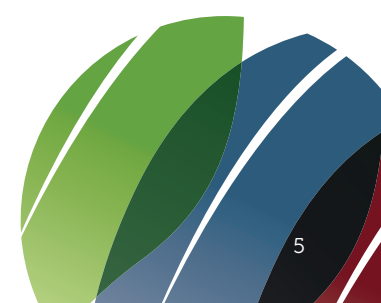
Four additional questions were included in the survey regarding self-rated dependency and past other drug use.


Final survey results are based on the completion of 494 surveys across Australia. As expected, the majority of respondents were male, with an average age of 35.7 years. Most were employees with the majority classifying themselves as a tradesperson (31%) or labourer (24%). Of the respondents:

- 286 (58%) scored above the cut-off cumulative score for risky or hazardous alcohol use, with 43 (15%) significantly 'at risk' of hazardous alcohol consumption

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

Many in the current sample appear to be at risk of hazardous alcohol consumption, which is consistent with the general population. However, a large proportion of these respondents claimed not to have a drinking problem and indicated that it would be fairly easy to cut back or stop their drinking behaviour. These results suggest that those who may be at risk are unaware that a problem may exist, further highlighting the need for educational programs to increase knowledge and awareness of the effects of alcohol and other drugs.





Findings from the semi-structured interviews have identified that there seems to be a general lack of understanding surrounding the physical effects of alcohol and other drug use and how these effects might impair performance. This is despite the general attitude that the use of alcohol and other drugs is detrimental to workplace productivity, safety and the risks that may eventuate for the individual user, as well as coworkers. Links to reduced safety and productivity levels are confirmed by those in safety advisory positions. In terms of prevalence, alcohol and other drug use is perceived as a major issue that is only getting worse, particularly in relation to drugs because they are harder to detect and deal with 'immediately'.

While current policies (and employee assistance programs) are generally seen as effective, there is an overall support for more comprehensive and tailored educational initiatives for employees and contractors within the construction workforce. In particular, the

need for educational preventative programs – rather than simply dealing with alcohol and other drug use after the fact (i.e. testing and dealing with positive results). Specifically identified was the need to educate younger employees about how to cope with the general lifestyle that can accompany a highly paid, project-to-project, transient type job.

The use of a mentoring type initiative was highlighted. Suggestions for the effective communication of alcohol and other drug education to all employees at training sessions included the use of clear, visual, hard copy brochures or posters, videos, as well as support for the development of a web-based resource.

The importance of management support, a strong supervisor relationship and commitment to better managing alcohol and other drugs, and the consistent communication of policies and expectations from the start of projects, to all those on-site, has also been highlighted. The culture of specific occupational groups may also warrant further investigation in that the nature and pressures of the job (with specific skills and hazards) can have a huge effect on employees' lives and relationships.

Step 2 & beyond

The SBEnrc Industry/Research Team and the National Steering Committee will work in consultation with industry representatives, including employers and employees to develop an appropriate industry policy and an associated change management program. It is anticipated that these will include a series of national case studies demonstrating industry best practice.

This research wouldn't be possible without the ongoing support of our industry, government and research partners:



Project endorsed by:

Centre for Accident Research and Road Safety - Queensland

National Drug Research Institute



**Sustainable
Built Environment**
National Research Centre

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