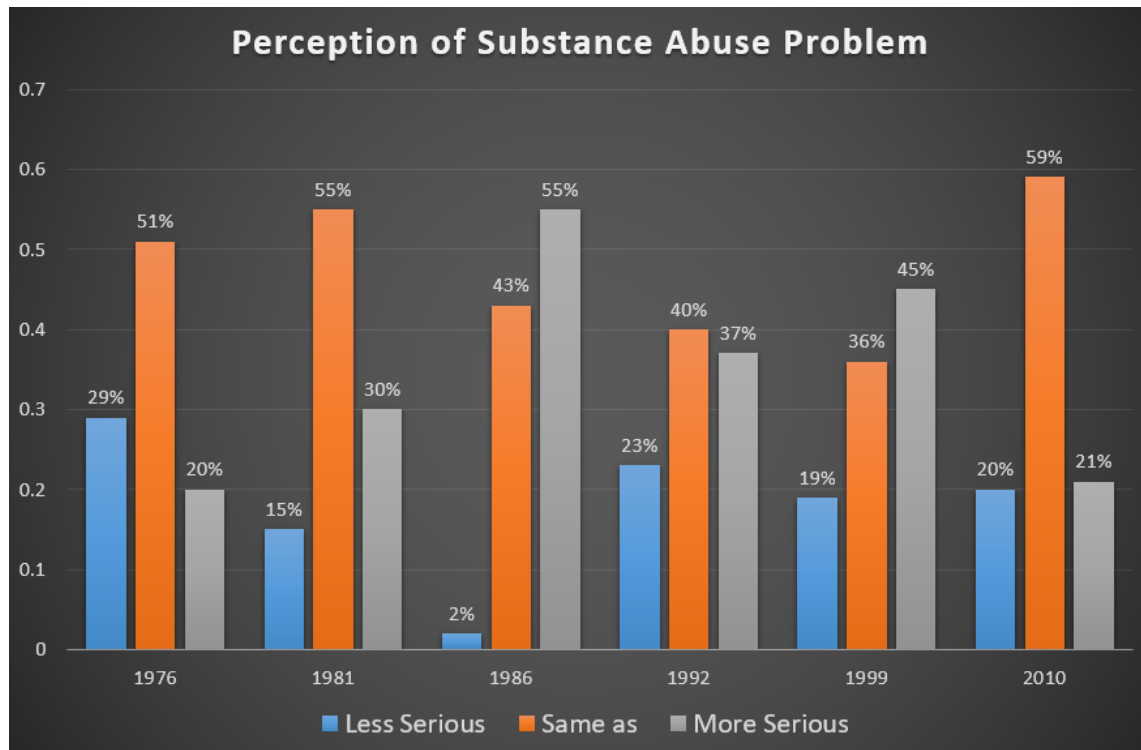


# Substance Abuse in Organizations

*Four Decades: Perspective  
1971 - 2010*

*A New Century: Changes*



**James W. Schreier, Ph.D., SPHR**



**EXECUTIVE  
SUMMARY**

## Preface

2010 represents the 40<sup>th</sup> year that I have been involved with the subject of substance abuse in organizations. Throughout the years, what began as a very personal motivation became a professional career goal. Then it became an academic research goal, and now again, a personal and professional commitment. It started simply. While inside a large organization in 1969 and 1970, I was shocked to watch disciplinary action taken against young employees who were assigned boring, repetitive tasks. I to understand why these young, intelligent employees would waste their minds by getting "stoned" every night, why they would report for work in highly important (although not engaging) positions unable to function effectively. I struggled equally with the inconsistencies in management practices. And I determined to work helping organizations manage employees in a way that would reduce the possibilities and effects of substance abuse.

I conducted a regional study of organizations in 1971, only the second survey of businesses at the time. Major studies were conducted in 1986 and 1999. These studies included detailed questions on a variety of issues and more detailed examination of issues like cocaine use, management strategies, and organizational culture. For this 2010 survey, a shorter survey focusing on some of the key questions asked in each of the surveys was developed.

*The report is dedicated to workers everywhere,  
individuals who deserve to work in a drug-free workplace and  
who deserve to work drug-free and enjoy the satisfaction of  
productive employment and well-managed organization.*

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# Introduction

Over the years, the Human Resource profession has faced numerous challenges: economic, social, and organizational. Some of these have become crises – summoning fast and powerful responses that have been successful sometimes – failures other times. Hot new topics, the rage of consultants, articles, and product developers become standard policy, lists of advice, and a software program with all the answers. For some organizations, this level brings sophisticated commitment to minimizing or eliminating the problem. To others – too many it seems – the level of “problem maturity” seems to bring a complacency and acceptability of “tolerable losses.”

Related to this issue of “tolerance & acceptability,” there is an issue of “integration versus isolation.” Talk to supervisors one day about sexual harassment, a week later about diversity, and a week later about substance abuse and you’re likely to have different perspectives on each issue. That’s OK. But they are equally likely to be three isolated presentations. The reality is that an organization’s success in dealing with any and all of these issues is related to some basic elements of organizational and management success.

A positive organizational culture will drive a successful substance abuse program – could even be a preventative factor. Strong management competencies, listening skills, giving clear information, and thinking clearly, will make it much easier to deal with diversity or sexual harassment or substance abuse – and will have an impact on prevention.

Fifteen and even ten years ago, individuals would approach the issue of substance abuse with an “element of passion.” The passion might be “fear,” a real strong motivator twenty years ago, it might be “fight,” a good motivator in the 80's move for a “drug-free workplace,” or it might be “reactionary” to the first incident of an employee stoned on a hallucinogen. Today almost every organization has adopted a 90's “been there - done that” approach that puts diversity, sexual harassment, substance abuse, and other topics as programs that are simply part of Human Resources. Does this make a difference? No, in some companies. Yes, in most...

Substance abuse in organizations has become one of many organizational problems that are affecting productivity, costing organizations money - and costing individuals productive careers and lives. It is important to examine real organizational experiences, policies, and practices. Very few organizations have been able to escape the problem.

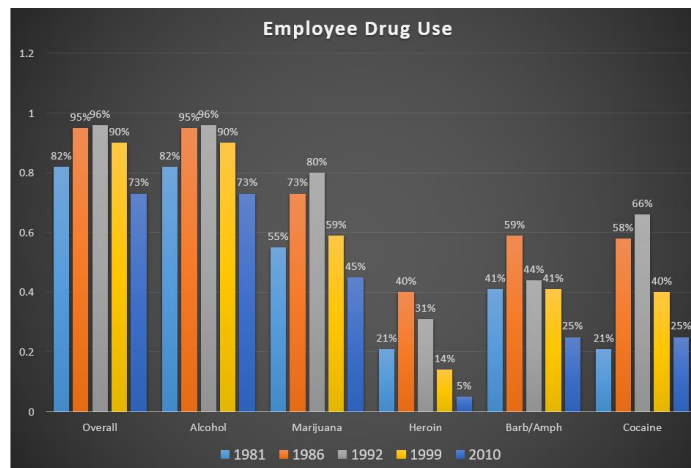
The results described in this study are based on 40 years of research. Surveys done at regular intervals in 1971, 1976, 1981, 1986, 1992, 1998, and 2010 have gathered data about organizations’ experience with substance abuse. The report also contains a variety of typical situations involving substance abuse. In these incidents, respondents provide insights into their management practices. This information is helpful to any organization trying to define or improve its practices for dealing with employee substance abuse.

## Major Findings

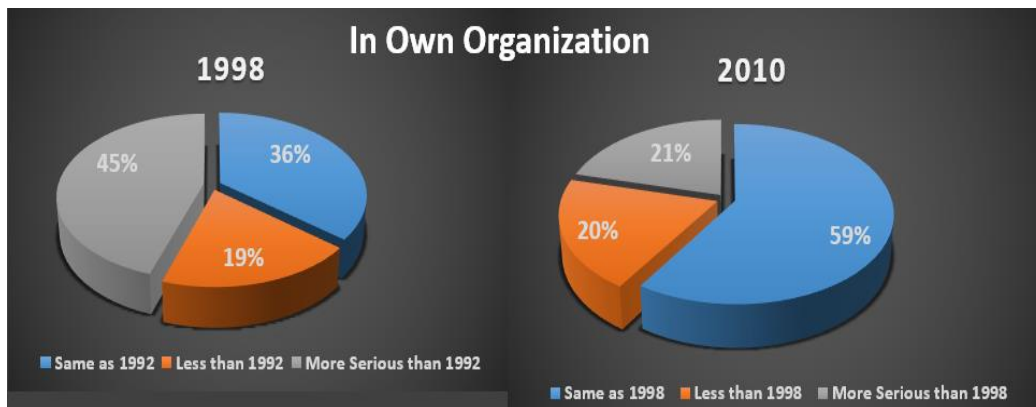
The last few years have had continued emphasis on positive management techniques and new challenges related to employment in a challenging employment. But with the positive news comes mixed results -- about substance abuse in the workplace. The seventh survey in a forty-year study of organizations reveals the following:

### Workplace Substance Abuse Is Down!

- 73% of organizations have had direct experience with employee substance abuse on the job. Led by experiences with alcohol which dropped, while experiences with cocaine, marijuana, heroin and barbiturates/amphetamines are also down significantly.



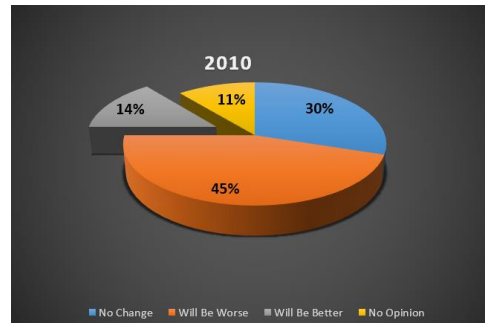
### A Majority Feel the Substance Abuse Problem Is the Same or More Serious than Five Years Ago



- 80% of organizations feel that the alcohol and drug abuse problem within their own organizations is the same or more serious than it was five years ago. This is an insignificant drop from the 1999 survey. There is, however, a significant increase in the number of respondents who perceive the problem as being “the same as” five year earlier.

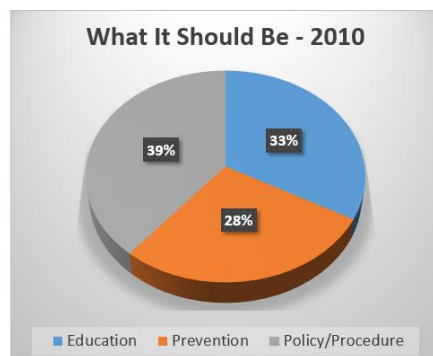
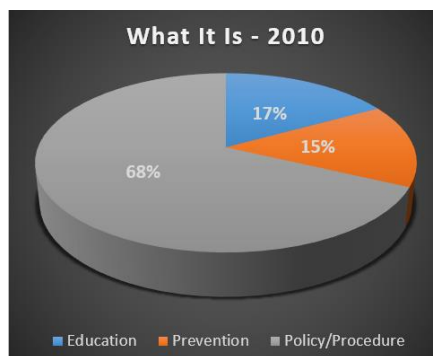
## Respondents Feel the Drug Problem Will Get Worse in the Next Five Years

- 45% of the respondents feel the drug and alcohol problem will get worse in the next five years – the exact percentage as reported in 1999. Optimism disappeared in the previous survey and dropped slightly to only 17% of the respondents reporting the problem will get better.



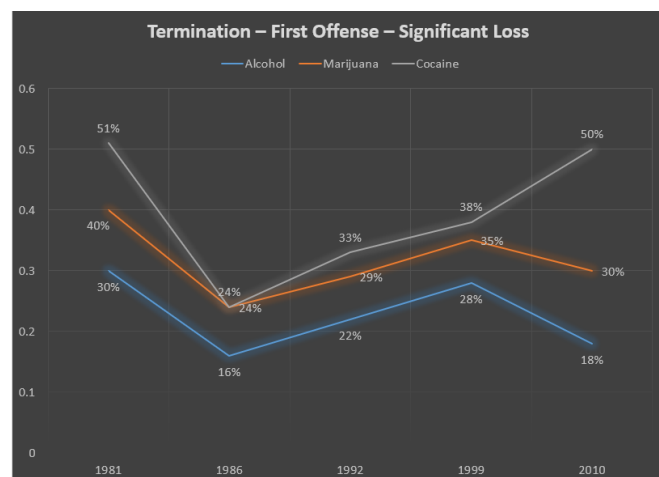
## Policy and Procedure Are the Primary Focus of Most Training

- Respondents reported that 68% of organizational training efforts related to substance abuse focus on policy and procedure, a significant increase from 55% in 1998. They believe this should be substantially less - with a much greater emphasis placed on education and prevention.



## Reactions to Substance Abuse Have Changed

- While responses to specific incidents of substance abuse have changed dramatically over the years, some of the most significant changes in the responses have appeared in the last surveys. An interesting switch occurred with increased first offense warnings for alcohol and marijuana and increased terminations for cocaine.



## Recommendations

Throughout this report, a number of recommendations are made concerning drug use, policies, training, organizational culture, and management issues. The following are highlights of the major recommendations.

1. Organizations cannot afford to deal with substance abuse problems in a superficial, policy-driven fashion. It is a problem that is not going away, despite changes in experience. It is a problem that decades of research indicate it cuts across rules, policies, management practices, and organizational culture. Therefore, it is a problem that must be addressed from a strategic viewpoint that is consistent with broader strategic goals of the organization.
2. Organizations must develop creative solutions to the problems of substance abuse and creative strategies for preventing substance abuse in the work force. This means new policies for intervention and treatment, new training programs, new programs for employee productivity and morale, and new programs for job and individual enrichment. An integrated (systems) approach that includes management style, organization culture, and employee assistance efforts must be considered.

*(Note: this recommendation was first made as part of this research twenty years ago -- it's been modified only slightly since then – I suspect it's going to continue to be made in the future.)*

3. Training is not the only element in an organization's effort to confront substance abuse. But its absence seriously hampers efforts for successful implementation of a policy or employee assistance programming. Organizations must increase training efforts. While most organizations recognize the importance of training, the emphasis it actually receives has declined.

## The Study Author

**James W. Schreier, Ph.D., SPHR** is the founder of Beyond the Far Cliffs. In addition to the Ph.D., he holds lifetime accreditation as a Senior Professional in Human Resources.

Dr. Schreier has been researching the problems of alcohol and drug abuse in organizations for 30 years. He has conducted major national surveys of company experiences, problems, and policies in 1971, 1976, 1981, 1986, 1992, 1998, and 2010. Dr. Schreier has spoken throughout the United States and in Europe about various aspects of the drug abuse problem in organizations and education. Dr. Schreier has appeared on numerous radio and television talk shows to discuss the drug abuse problem in organizations. He has published extensively on the problem and has participated in national efforts, including the 1986 "Controlling Substance Abuse" report, published by The Conference Board. In 1990, Dr. Schreier presented at the 5th Annual European Employee Assistance Conference in Ireland. In 1991, he was asked to return to make the opening address at the 6th Annual European Employee Assistance Conference. The results of this on-going research have been published in **Training and Development Journal**, **Personnel**, **Psychology Today**, **EAP Digest**, **John Naisbitt's Trend Letter**, and numerous other professional publications.

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Beyond the Far Cliffs is a management consulting organization, dedicated to improving both individual and organizational performance.

HR-Tracks.com regularly conducts research projects into critical human resource and management issues. Current projects include the on-going, forty-year study of substance abuse in the workplace, research into the ethical issues of recruitment, selection, and job-hunting practices.

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