

# **Substance Abuse in Organizations**

**1971 – 1986**

**Realities - - - - Trends- - - - Reactions**



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



**EXECUTIVE  
SUMMARY**

## Preface

Officially, 1987 represents the seventeenth year that I have been involved with the subject of substance abuse in American 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 struggled with why these young, intelligent employees would waste their minds by getting "stoned" every night. I struggled equally with the inconsistencies in management practices. Throughout graduate school, I determined to work helping organizations manage employees in a way that would eliminate the effect of substance abuse.

*The report is dedicated to the American worker, a person who deserves to work in a drug free work place and who deserves to work drug free to enjoy the satisfaction of productive employment.*

JWS 1/14/87

## Note (2017)

*This report has been re-formatted to include improved graphics and charts. Minor editing was done to improve grammar and punctuation. Absolutely no changes were made to basic data or interpretations.*

## Introduction

Substance abuse in organizations has been described in the media as a current crisis. It has been portrayed in other sectors as a creation of the media. 1987 is not part of a new period where drug abuse in organizations has captured the attention of the public. Similar media attention has been generated at various times in early 1970's. It is important to examine real organizational experiences, policies, and practices to determine whether or not a real crisis exists. The data contained in this report support that there is indeed a crisis in organizations. Very few organizations have been able to escape the problem.

The results described in this study are based on fifteen years of research using the same data base to obtain consistent results. Surveys done at five-year intervals in 1971, 1976, 1981, and 1986 have gathered data about organizations experience with substance abuse. Information about organization policies, procedures, training efforts, and evaluation techniques are examined. And the report for 1986 includes special, new information on management's viewpoints on cocaine, drug testing, and the call for a "drug free work force." The report also contains a variety of typical situations involving substance abuse and testing. 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.

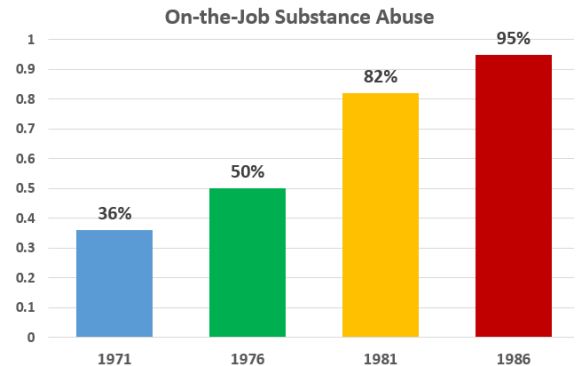
**Note:** This "Executive Summary" contains the **Major Findings** section of the full report. The full report is available at [www.hr-tracks.com](http://www.hr-tracks.com). This "Executive Summary" can be reproduced and distributed "as is," with credit for [www.hr-tracks.com](http://www.hr-tracks.com) and the Author information.

## Major Findings

1987 is a year that begins with continued emphasis on positive management techniques. Lessons from "Excellence," "One-Minute Management," "Megatrends," and others have shown us that organizations can be successful, good places to work. But within the positive news comes the negative news -- about substance abuse in the workplace. The fourth survey in a fifteen-year collection of information indicates the following major findings.

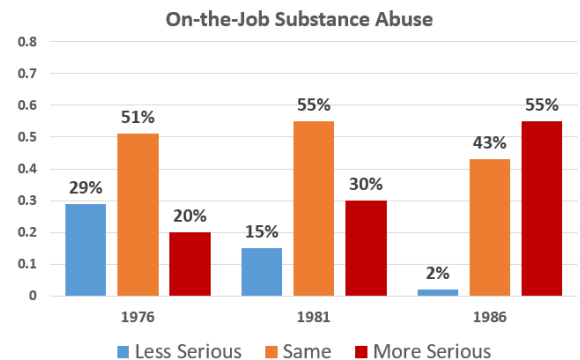
### On-The-Job Substance Abuse Has Increased

- 95% of organizations have had direct experience with employee substance abuse on the job. Fifteen years ago, only 36% of the responding organizations reported direct experience. Ten years ago, it was 50% and five years ago it was 82%.



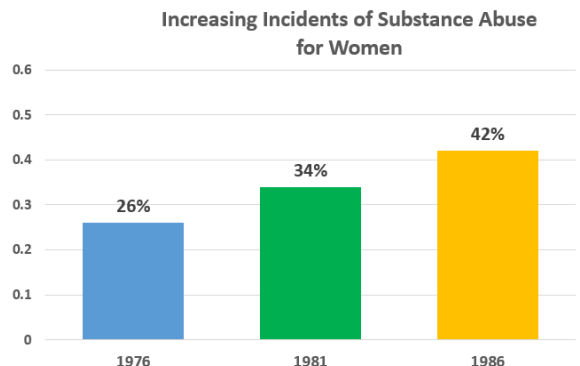
### A Majority Feel the Problem Is More Serious than Five Years Ago

- 98% 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. Ten years ago, 71% felt it was the same or more serious. Five years ago, 85% of the organizations felt it was the same or more serious.



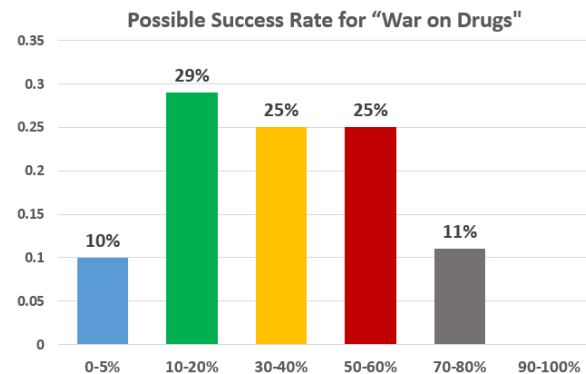
### The Substance Abuse Problem Is Still Growing Among Women

- More respondents, 42%, feel that the alcohol and drug abuse problem among women is growing. In 1976, 26% felt the problem was growing among women. In 1981, 34% felt it was growing among women.



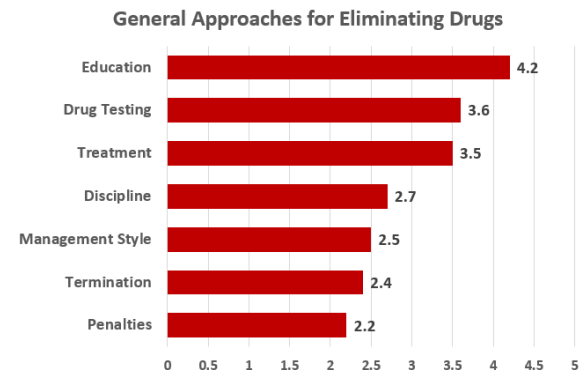
## The Government's War on Drugs Is Not Seen as Very Successful

For the first time in fifteen years, the Federal Government, led by President Reagan's "war on drugs" has directly targeted the work place. But only 10% of the survey respondents feel that this movement has better than a 50% chance of succeeding.



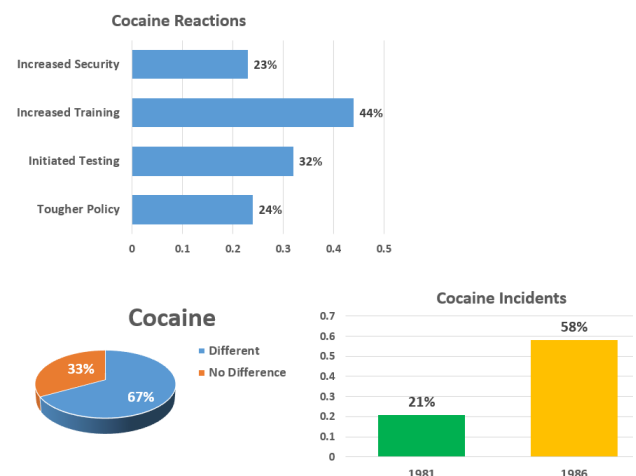
## Education Is the Favored Technique for Eliminating Drugs in the Work Force

There is some movement toward tougher penalties, stricter policies, and an increased emphasis on testing. But survey respondents still rank education as the alternative with the most potential for eliminating drugs from the work place.



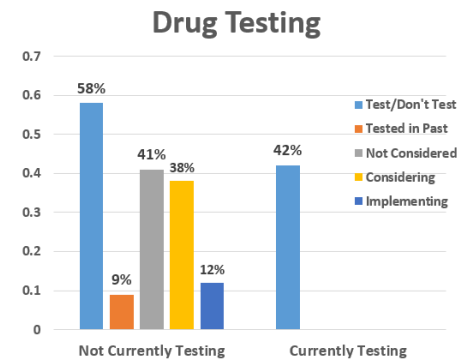
## Cocaine Is Viewed as a Different Drug in the Workplace

A majority of respondents feel that cocaine is different from other drugs in the work place. 24% of the organizations have changed their policies because of cocaine. 44% increased training. And 32% initiated drug testing programs because of the growing cocaine problem. While on-the-job substance abuse increased in all categories since 1981, the increase in cocaine incidents was the greatest, from 21% in 1981 to 58% in 1986.



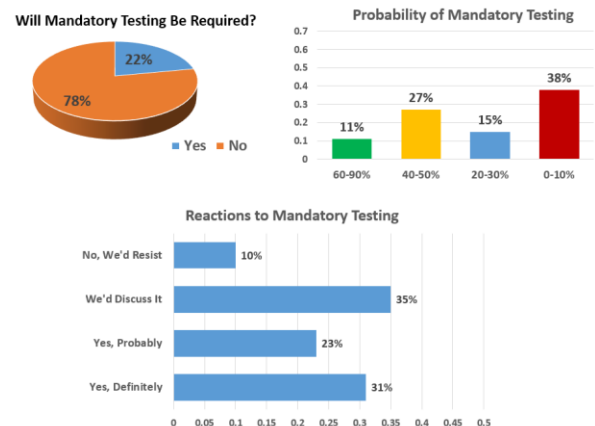
## Drug Testing Is Increasing in Use and Being Considered by Many Organizations

- 42% of the organizations are currently testing for drugs. Of the remaining, 38% are considering drug testing at the present time and an additional 12% have made plans to initiate drug testing within the next year.



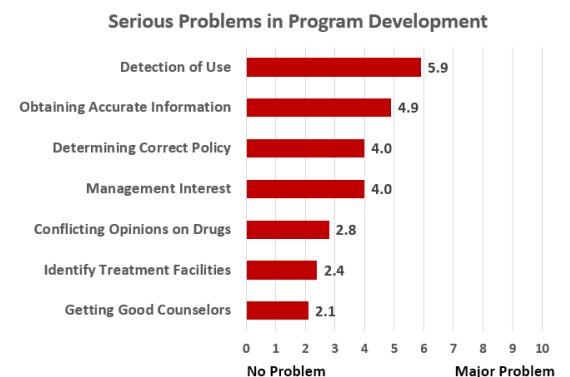
## Organizations Would Drug Test Although Few Think It Will Become Mandatory

- Just over 20% of the respondents feel that an attempt will be made to require drug testing. Most feel it has little probability of becoming a reality. While some organizations wanted to reserve judgement, most feel they would comply if drug testing were made mandatory.



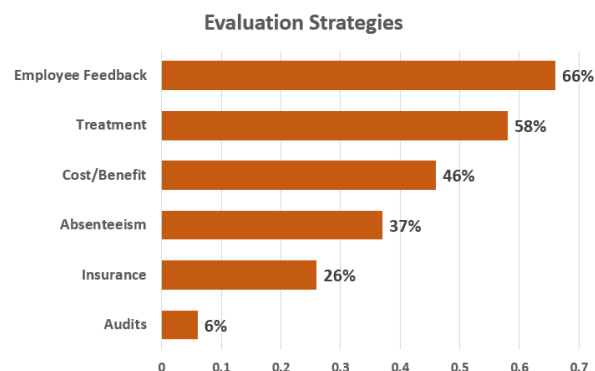
## Detection of Drug Use Is the Most Serious Problem for Most Organizations

- Detection of drug use has always been the most cited problem by the organizations in the data base. Obtaining accurate information remains the number two problem, followed by getting management interested in the program.



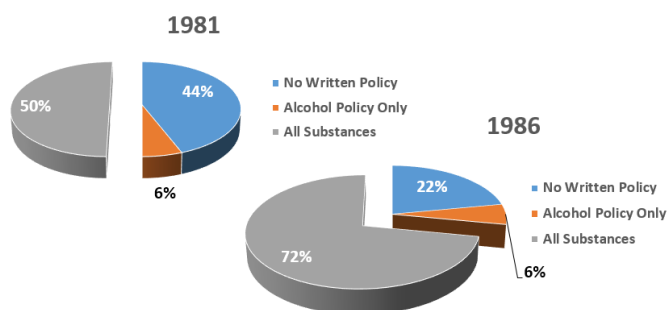
## Employee Feedback and Treatment Success Are Favored for Evaluation

While a variety of techniques are used to evaluate employee assistance and other alcohol and drug programs, most organizations use several techniques. And positive results have been achieved by most organizations. Treatment success and employee feedback have yielded positive results in a large number of organizations.



## A Significant Number of Organizations Still Do Not Have Written Policies

Despite all the available research and despite all the publicity the substance abuse problem in organizations has received, 22% of the organizations do not have a written policy on alcohol and drugs.

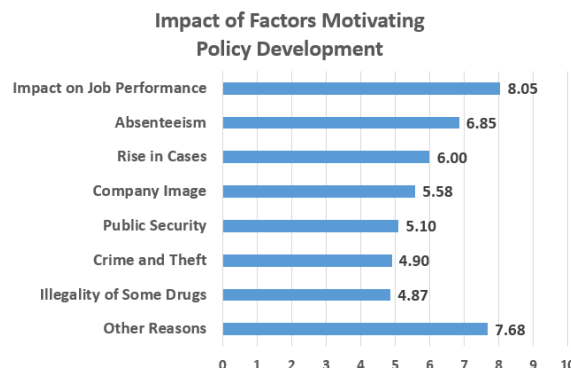


## A Majority of Organizations Have Revised Their Policies in the Last Five Years

78% of the companies have written policies covering alcohol and other drugs. 55% of the companies revised their policies during 1986 and an additional 25% revised their policies since 1981.

## Job Performance Is the Number One Motivation for Policy Development

Job performance has been the number one motivating factor for policy development in each of the four studies. Absenteeism and the rise in cases among employees have had the next largest impact in the most recent study.

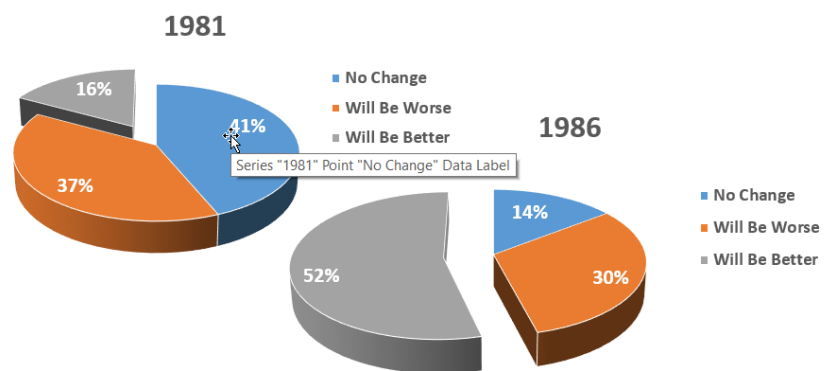


## Major Questions Exist about Drug Testing and New Drugs

- In the last fifteen years, three different "crisis periods" have occurred. The third is occurring right now with major increases in on- the-job drug use, questions about drug testing, and the widespread use of new drugs and/or drugs that were unpopular five and ten years ago.

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

- It is encouraging that 52% of the organizations feel the drug and alcohol problem will get better in the next five years.



## About the 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 40+ years. He has conducted major national surveys of company experiences, problems, and policies in 1971, 1976, 1981, 1986, 1992, 1998, and 2004. 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. 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.

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**.

---

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

**HR-Tracks** has conducted research projects into critical human resource and management issues. 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.

[www.farcliffs.com](http://www.farcliffs.com)

[www.hr-tracks.com](http://www.hr-tracks.com)