

**Occupational Health Group** is a service offered to the business community of North Alabama by Decatur General Hospital and Huntsville Hospital Systems

## Alabama Drug-Free Workplace

by Trevor Perry, Alabama Department of Industrial Relations, Workers' Compensation Division

Are you interested in saving 5% on your workers' compensation insurance premiums? Are you interested in reducing your risks of having workplace accidents and injuries? Here's one way to accomplish both of these objectives – become certified as a drug-free workplace.

Almost ten years ago, the Alabama Legislature adopted Acts 1995, No. 95-535, The Drug-Free Workplace Program, which became effective October 1, 1995. The Legislature's stated intent was to afford employers "the opportunity to maximize their levels of productivity, enhance their competitive positions in the marketplace and reach their desired levels of success without experiencing the costs, delays and tragedies associated with work related accidents resulting from substance abuse by employees."

Although the Department does not capture data to provide the number of Alabama accidents attributed to alcohol or drug use, there are studies from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that show staggering numbers. A recent study from the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment showed the following:

- 7.7% of all workers are heavy drinkers or drug users.
- 19% of all waiters & bartenders are heavy users
- 14% of all construction workers are heavy users
- 10% of all transportation workers are heavy users
- 76% of all addicts are white, rural Americans
- Abusers are 1/3 less productive and file 4 times as many health insurance claims
- An estimated 35% of all workers' compensation injuries involve drugs or alcohol

Looking at these numbers makes it a little easier to see the employer's direct and indirect costs attributable to alcohol and drugs - recruitment, training, lost time, decreased quality and/or productivity and health insurance. Did you know that the study mentioned above also showed that workers who used drugs were more likely to have worked for three or more employers, to have left a job in the past year and to have skipped a day or more of work in the past month? How much is this costing you? Answer – plenty. The dollar amount will vary depending upon the employer and the type of business, but each employer should know and understand his or her cost in the above areas.

The Drug-Free Workplace Program was designed for employers who insure their workers' compensation exposure through a traditional insurance company. Individual self-insured businesses and group fund participants are exempted from this provision of the law. Since roughly half of all employers in the State of Alabama insure their risks through the voluntary market there are a large number of employers who could qualify as a Drug-Free Workplace. Amazingly though, only a small percentage of employers have actually taken advantage of this program. Why is that? Although there are a myriad of reasons, here are some that we've considered - do you fall into any of these categories?

- Not educated on the existence of the program
- Belief that it would take too much time and effort
- Belief that the costs to implement are too high

- Naive belief that their employees do not use or abuse any substances
- Rash decision not to implement any type of preventative program

It is our hope that this article and the recommendations from those of you who are reading it will help to increase the knowledge of others who may be interested in using the drug-free program, or perhaps help those previous naysayers to reconsider.

In any given year we have an average of 305 employers applying through this office for certification as a drug-free workplace. Of that number, an average of 187 employers are actually certified. While the Department has not tracked or looked into reasons why certifications are denied, it is quite easy to list the most common:

- Lack of communication between the Department and the drug-free workplace coordinator
- Failure or refusal to follow-up with departmental written comments
- Failure to submit revised policies and other requested documentation.

History has shown that many employers have jumped in head first when attempting to implement a drug-free workplace program without having taken the time to review the Drug-Free Workplace Law, Code of Alabama, 1975, §§ 25-5-330 through 340, and/or the Department of Industrial Relations Administrative Code Rules 480-5-6-.01 through .04. These two sources of information not only explain the requirements of the program, but also help to reduce follow-up questions from the Department upon application. These documents and other information can be viewed or downloaded from the Workers' Compensation's homepage, <http://dir.alabama.gov/wc>, by scrolling down and clicking on Drug-Free Workplace Program.

Since the Drug-Free Workplace Law became effective, the expenditures in workers' compensation losses in

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### HUNTSVILLE CLINIC NEW HOURS

Starting September 1, 2005 the hours for the Huntsville Clinic will be changing.

The new hours will be:  
Monday – Friday 7a.m. to 6 p.m.

### OHG DIRECTORY

Administration .....	256/922-6675
Marketing & Business Development .....	256/922-6677
Billing Department .....	256/922-6670
OHG - Decatur .....	256/353-4325
OHG - Huntsville .....	256/265-7000
OHG - Madison .....	256/774-7300
Wellness Services .....	256/922-6699

[www.OHGonline.org](http://www.OHGonline.org)

# Behavioral Medicine Opens New Huntsville Office

Decatur General West, Behavioral Medicine Center, is pleased to announce the opening of its Huntsville office. Decatur General West's Huntsville office will now be able to work closer with all of OHG's clinics and employers, offering services such as:

- Drug Free Work Place Training
- DOT Certified Substance Abuse Professional (SAP) Program, Training, and Referrals
- Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) and Training
- Drug and Alcohol Outpatient Services
- Critical Incident Stress Debriefing

In addition to the employer related services, Decatur General West also performs assessment and referral for inpatient and outpatient treatment for child, adolescent, adult and geriatric persons seeking help.

Decatur General West is a 64-bed inpatient psychiatric hospital located on Beltline Rd. in Decatur, Alabama.

You may contact them directly by calling 256-551-2710 or 800-937-3873, or for more information, please contact Kevin Borden, Director of Business Development and Marketing, at 256-306-4029.



## Flu News

Influenza is one of the leading causes of absenteeism from work. Unlike the common cold, the flu can leave a person unable to

function for several days- a problem that plagues many companies across north Alabama. On average, unscheduled absences cost U.S. employers \$602 for every employee annually, and according to trends, these expenses are only expected to increase in the coming years.

Looking for a solution? Through OHG's on-site Wellness Services Department, businesses have a unique opportunity to sponsor a flu clinic tailored specifically to the needs of their employees and organization. OHG's on-site flu vaccination program can reduce absenteeism, increase productivity, improve workplace morale, and cuts medical costs, for the employer and employee. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) is reporting that U.S. businesses could save \$12 billion annually through proactive flu shot campaigns and other wellness services.

### The cost per employee for on-site vaccination is \*:

Over 500 participants	\$25.00
301- 500 participants	\$26.00
101-300 participants	\$27.00
51 -100 participants	\$28.00
25 - 50 participants	\$30.00

\* Per the Center for Disease Control (CDC), prices for influenza vaccine this year have increased over last year. Our pricing is a direct result of the price increase from our distributors.

If you expect less than 25 participants, you may send your employees to any of our OHG Clinics. The cost at the clinic is \$30.00 per person. We will be administering vaccinations on-site and at our clinics during October and November.

More and more companies are choosing OHG because of our almost 20 years of experience, reliability and hassle-free operations. They realize that running a successful flu vaccination program is so much more than providing flu shots. To partner with OHG means that you'll have confidence that your flu vaccine program will be successful. To find out how to develop a program that's customized to meet your specific needs, contact OHG Wellness Services at 256-922-6699.

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1975, §§ 25-5-330 through 340, and/or the Department of Industrial Relations Administrative Code Rules 480-5-6-.01 through .04. These two sources of information not only explain the requirements of the program, but also help to reduce follow-up questions from the Department upon application. These documents and other information can be viewed or downloaded from the Workers' Compensation's homepage, <http://dir.alabama.gov/wc>, by scrolling down and clicking on Drug-Free Workplace Program.

Since the Drug-Free Workplace Law became effective, the expenditures in workers' compensation losses in Alabama have risen from \$525,073,388 to \$629,360,494, an increase of 19.86% since January 1996. While there are a number of reasons why workers' compensation costs have risen, they can be attributed most often to higher wages and higher medical costs. Here's where your part comes in. You have the potential to reduce your expenditures through effective management of the Drug-Free Workplace program. Be careful, however, as it is only when you demand strict enforcement of your program where the savings can be realized.

It is extremely important to any business to reduce its costs. Let's face it, you're not out there trying to lose money. There are certain things you can do to be successful. You can help reduce your workers' compensation costs by placing a sufficient emphasis on safety, training and loss control, and for the past 13 years many have become familiar with making use of the department's free ombudsman program. Now you have one more way of getting those costs down. Besides, when's the last time you heard of insurance premiums going down. For once, get out there and take advantage of what the law gives you.

If an employer or any other interested party has a question, they may contact Russ Black or Trevor Perry at (800) 528-5166 or (334) 353-0540, or by email at [Russ.Black@dir.alabama.gov](mailto:Russ.Black@dir.alabama.gov) or [Trevor.Perry@dir.alabama.gov](mailto:Trevor.Perry@dir.alabama.gov).

## HOLIDAY CLOSINGS

All OHG clinics will be closed in observance of the following holidays:

- Labor Day** - Monday, September 5, 2005
- Thanksgiving** - November 24th and 25th
- Christmas** - December 23rd and 26th
- New Year's** - Open until 2 p.m. Dec. 30th and closed all day January 2, 2006.



**DECATUR**  
1615 Kathy Lane, SW  
Decatur, AL 35603  
256/353-4325

**HUNTSVILLE**  
1963 Memorial Parkway  
Huntsville, AL 35801  
256/265-7000

**MADISON**  
9238 Madison Blvd., #200  
Madison, AL 35758  
256/774-7300

**WELLNESS SERVICES**  
6767 Old Madison Pike #400  
Huntsville, AL 35806  
256/922-6699