



VIEW*S* & VISIONS

A publication of Bowles Rice LLP

Spring 2013



The Value of a Drug-Free Workplace

Dan Smoot, President
Operation UNITE

Dan Smoot is president and chief executive officer of Operation UNITE.

Mr. Smoot was named UNITE's first director of law enforcement upon the organization's creation in 2003. He became vice president in September 2011, overseeing day-to-day operations for the multifaceted initiative, and was elevated to his current position in May 2013.

Prior to joining UNITE, Mr. Smoot served 22 years with the Kentucky State Police – 14 in the Narcotics Division – where he received two Meritorious Service Awards, two Commissioner Commendations, and was selected the 2002 Statewide Trooper of the Year.

Mr. Smoot earned a bachelor of science degree in criminal justice from Eastern Kentucky University and is a graduate of the Kentucky State Police Academy.

He currently serves as first vice president of the Kentucky Narcotics Officers' Association and first vice president of the Kentucky Association of Chiefs of Police.

In a perfect world, employers would have no trouble finding qualified and dedicated employees. But, today's workforce is far more complex and cluttered by outside influences – including the devastating effects of prescription drug addiction, either directly by an individual employee or indirectly from the effects on family and friends of the employee. These workers become a liability instead of an asset.

Operation UNITE (Unlawful Narcotics Investigations, Treatment and Education) is a nonprofit organization seeking to educate and activate individuals by developing and empowering community coalitions to no longer accept or tolerate the drug culture. The organization believes that business leaders, government officials, educators and community organizations have integral roles and responsibilities to become part of the solution to this problem.

Unintentional drug overdoses resulted in the death of one person every 15 minutes in 2010, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which has labeled prescription drug abuse a national epidemic. Unintentional overdoses are now the leading cause of accidental death in the United States, surpassing car crashes. Those who believe that prescription drug abuse is “not my problem” need to re-evaluate their position. While the human toll should be incentive enough, communities – and the businesses that breathe life into them – are increasingly finding themselves overwhelmed by costs created from lost productivity, drug-related crimes, higher insurance



premiums and workplace safety issues, to name but a few. The annual economic cost of drug trafficking and abuse is estimated at \$215 billion in the United States. This includes an estimated \$72.5 billion to health insurers (paid for through your premiums) and another \$8.2 billion to the criminal justice system (paid for through your taxes).

Seventy-five percent of all illicit drug users are employed. Between one-third and one-half of all workers' compensation claims are related to substance abuse. Do you see any potential liability problems here?



As a narcotics investigator, I was exposed to some of the worst of humanity. “Lock ‘em up and throw away the key” was, for years, the general attitude of law enforcement.

Sure, there are still those who need to be in prison, but UNITE has broadened my perspective. Addiction happens to people at all socioeconomic levels, in urban as well as rural communities. I have witnessed the positive results of people pulling together.

Often a drug-user must hit rock bottom before they reach out for help. When someone has lost all hope, they need treatment and support to reclaim their lives and once again become productive members



NATIONAL
RX DRUG ABUSE
SUMMIT
NationalRxDrugAbuseSummitf.org

Dates for the
2014 Summit will be
announced soon

of society. At the same time, we need to equip society – especially our youth – with the knowledge and skills they need to make good choices. They are, after all, the workforce of tomorrow.

So what can businesses do?

First, maintain a drug-free workplace environment. Supervisors need to educate themselves about substance abuse policy, enforce this policy, be able to recognize the signs and symptoms of use, and know what action should be taken when confronted by the issue. Employees must understand and support the company's plan, know what resources are available, and feel they can report suspected problems.

Second, support legislative efforts aimed toward prevention and control. Be prepared to face opposition to new regulations.

Third, provide on-the-clock opportunities for supervisors and employees to become engaged in anti-drug efforts. Allow workers to become involved with education

programs (either in schools or at the community level), offer training and, when possible, provide direct support to anti-drug organizations. This can be as simple as distributing information through company newsletters or payroll inserts.

Fourth, let employees know that you care. Establish an Employee Assistance Program geared toward providing support, offering encouragement and letting employees know you value their contributions.

For the last two years, UNITE has hosted a National Rx Drug Abuse Summit – the largest national collaboration of professionals from local, state and federal agencies, business, academia, clinicians, treatment providers, counselors, educators, state and national leaders, and advocates – to focus on ways we can all make an impact. Citing the importance of a drug-free population to sustainable economic growth, the Appalachian Regional Commission has served as UNITE's educational partner. We will offer a third Summit in early 2014.

If we wish to create productive, drug-free workplaces within our communities, we must focus on the broader picture. Every business has a stake in the outcome, and every business has an obligation to be part of the solution. I encourage you to get involved. ▽