

January 17, 2006  
Vital Signs

## Behavior: Cocktails on a Coffee Break? You're Not Alone

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Millions of Americans have drunk alcohol on the job or before going to work, a new study suggests. Much has been written about how alcohol use and abuse affect work performance through absenteeism and other problems.

This study, in the current *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, set out instead to look at the extent of alcohol use and impairment. The researchers, led by Michael R. Frone of the Research Institute on Addictions at the State University of New York at Buffalo, surveyed 2,800 adults in 48 states, asking how often they drank alcohol within two hours of reporting to work, how often they drank it on the job and how often they worked feeling the effects of alcohol or having a hangover.

In all, 15 percent of the people surveyed said that over the previous year, they had fallen into one of those categories at least once, with young people and those working nontraditional shifts most likely to do so. Among the jobs most affected by alcohol use are those in sales, entertainment, sports, media and maintenance.

While the findings suggest that alcohol use or impairment at work is not commonplace, the incidence is still great enough to warrant closer attention from employers, Dr. Frone said.

"Whether it leads to impairment or not," he said, "employers have a legitimate right to say that you shouldn't drink during the workday. And they have a right to say that you don't appear at the workplace impaired."

Based on the survey, the study estimated that 1.8 percent of the workforce drank alcohol before going to work.

About 7 percent, it said, had drunk during the workday, usually at lunch. And about 1.7 percent had worked while feeling the effects of alcohol. More, 9.2 percent, said they had worked with hangovers.