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Media Release

28 June – 1 July 2007:
Adelaide
Convention Centre,
South Australia,
Australia

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26 June 2007

Battling alcohol use in the workplace

Three million working days are lost in Australia each year due to alcohol and drug related issues, according to a leading industry expert.

“Research has shown that absenteeism resulting from hangovers or alcohol and drug related injuries costs Australian businesses more than \$500 million every year¹. This is a very serious problem,” said Donna Bull, CEO of Alcohol and other Drugs Council of Australia.

“Although many people are concerned about illicit drug use in the workplace, alcohol is actually the bigger issue. A third of the Australian workforce regularly drinks at risky levels, and one in every 16 works under the influence of alcohol.²”

“We know that alcohol and drug use poses considerable risks, including loss of productivity and occupational health and safety issues. It goes without saying that more needs to be done to address the problem,” Ms Bull said.

Ms Bull said alcohol related issues are more predominant in the hospitality, and building and construction industries.

“The problem is higher in these occupations, but it’s not confined to a specific industry. We have seen problems right throughout the entire workforce.

“Factors that increase the risk of substance abuse in the workplace include shift work, low levels of supervision, lack of control over work and periods of high stress or boredom.”

Ms Bull said although there is no fail-safe method, there are strategies companies can adopt to deter alcohol and drug use in the workplace.

<more>

¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2006. Alcohol and work: patterns of use, workplace culture and safety.

² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2006. Alcohol and work: patterns of use, workplace culture and safety.

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Top tips for organisations include:

- Ensure you have comprehensive and effective policies about drugs and alcohol. Your staff need to be clear about what is expected of them.
- Examine your workplace culture. How is alcohol used in the workplace – is it used as a reward for meeting a sales target or securing a new client?
- Create a good employee education strategy. Provide health information to staff about the negative affects of drugs and alcohol.
- Train your supervisors on how to manage intoxicated employees. Our advice is to treat it in the same way as any other performance management problem.

Ms Bull will present on alcohol and drug use in the work place at the Australian Psychological Society Industrial and Organisational Psychology (IOP) Conference at the Adelaide Convention Centre from 28 June to 1 July.

For more information please visit: www.iopconference.com.au.

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Donna Bull is available for interview during the conference. Please call Elaine Grant on: 0412 683 068.

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