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NEWS RELEASE

**BUREAU OF
BUSINESS
AND ECONOMIC
RESEARCH**

April 1, 2009

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ALCOHOL ABUSE COSTS MONTANA ECONOMY \$500 MILLION ANNUALLY

MISSOULA –

Alcohol abuse costs the Montana economy more than a half billion dollars per year in medical costs, lost wages and productivity, and other public and private spending, according to a study released April 1 by The University of Montana's Bureau of Business and Economic Research.

“We collectively spend \$510.6 million, or about 1.7 percent of the total state economy as measured by gross domestic product, dealing with the unintended consequences of alcohol consumption,” BBER Director Patrick Barkey said. “These costs represent what we all pay every year.”

The research, funded as part of a grant from the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, is the first of its kind conducted in Montana.

“The purpose of the study was to learn how a very familiar drug affects us all,” said Steve Seninger, a member of the Montana Epidemiological Workgroup that oversaw the report. “The results of the study help put all of our substance abuse efforts in perspective.”

Alcohol is certainly no stranger to Montana, but the ways in which excessive alcohol consumption appear in the bottom line of the state’s economy may be startling:

- **Alcohol-treatment centers around the state** – supporting detoxification services, inpatient and outpatient treatment, and long- and short-term residential services: \$10.7 million; medical care in hospitals and clinics, treating conditions either caused or complicated by alcohol abuse: \$100.3 million;

- **Loss of life** – removing productive workers from the economy, often at a young age in the prime of their working lives: \$296.8 million;

- **Loss of worker productivity** – from higher tardiness and absenteeism, lower productivity while on the job, more sick days, a shorter or a more restricted working career paid for by businesses, governments and families: \$53.3 million;

- **Crime and criminal behavior** – the extra police, judges and prison cells needed to protect citizens and enforce the laws that are broken because of the impairing impacts of alcohol: \$49.1 million.

There are a number of costs inflicted by alcohol that cannot be estimated from the available data. These include fires started by those who have been drinking, loss of function from

alcohol-related injuries and victim costs resulting from crimes. If these costs could be quantified, the above total estimates would be higher.

“The tragedies that can result from alcohol abuse produce a toll on families and individuals that goes beyond dollars and cents,” Barkey said. “But the quantification we attempt to carry out in this study can at least bring to light the economic side of the story.”

Copies of the report are available on the BBER Web site at <http://www.bber.umt.edu>.

Call 406-243-5113 for more information.

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