



DrugFree@WorkPlace

Are Workplace Drug Tests Reliable?

Drug testing is used by employers to try to control illegal drug use in the workplace. The reason for this is to ensure a good and safe working environment and avoid employee addiction problems and accidents. Drug testing is particularly important in work sectors where the risk of accidents is high.

Some employees may believe that recreational drug use is harmless, and that illegal drug use outside of work is a private matter, but employers know that workplace impairment can pose serious safety risks, especially in industries that require precision and alertness.

Drug users always deny their use of illegal drugs, but recent data reported in prior newsletters indicate that the use of controlled substances is increasing in working life. This is why many employers have implemented drug free workplace programs that include drug testing.

However—while workplace drug testing is known to be valuable, and necessary—considering the consequences of testing positive for drugs (suspension or

job termination) employees want to be assured that testing is reliable, accurate, and carried out in a correct and legally sound manner.

Drug Test Confirmations

Employees need to understand that since a positive drug test can have serious negative consequences for both the person being tested *and the employer*, businesses always want to try to minimize the risk of errors. Therefore, companies never rely solely on preliminary results from onsite rapid screening methods (like onsite urine tests, or oral fluid tests). All preliminary positive test results must be confirmed by HHS or CAP certified confirmation laboratories.

Certified confirmation labs use a process known as Gas Chromatography/Mass Spectrometry (GC/MS) to confirm if a drug test is actually positive or not. Firmly established methods of drug testing like GC/MS are considered reliable because of years of scientific validation. Enough government and private studies have been published over the years with sufficiently consistent results to prove that drug testing, when performed properly, is a valid method of determining employee drug use.

Medical Review Officers

Many companies also have an MRO (Medical Review Officer) assess all positive test results to rule out accepted alternative explanations rather than illegal drug use.

A Medical Review Officer is a licensed physician who is responsible for receiving and reviewing an employer's laboratory drug test results and evaluating medical explanations for positive drug test results.

The MRO acts as an independent and impartial "gatekeeper" and advocates for the accuracy and integrity of the drug testing process. They provide quality assurance reviews of the drug testing process for the specimens under their review, determine if there is a legitimate medical explanation for laboratory confirmed positives, adulterated, substituted and invalid drug test results, ensure the timely flow of test results and other information to employers, and protect the confidentiality of the drug testing information.

When a drug test is judged by the MRO as being positive due to the use of a legitimate medical prescription, the doctor will report the test as negative to the employer and no action will be taken against the employee. This is important, because while on average 70% of all positive drug tests are verified by an MRO as

due to illegal drug use, 30% are attributed to medical prescriptions.

Drug tests at work that are confirmed by a certified laboratory and reviewed by the MRO are beneficial for both the employers, who aim to prevent associated problems and costs, and for employees, who may wish to clear up unjustified suspicions against them.

Conclusion

Drug testing, a standard procedure in many workplaces across the U.S., is one of the most straightforward and effective ways companies prioritize the safety and wellness of their staff members. Drug testing is reliable, beneficial, and legally justified as a method of preventing employees from seriously harming themselves or others due to being impaired at work.

However, while requiring employee drug testing does provide many benefits to employers, companies must also have policies in place that protect employee rights, and support accountability, recovery, and self-identification during work activities. From health and safety benefits to productivity, it is financially and legally beneficial for businesses to have a comprehensive, fair, and equitable drug free workplace program in place.



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Supervisor Newsletter

Government and Business Response to the Opioid Epidemic

There has been much focus recently on government attempts to combat the opioid crisis in America and stop the flow of fentanyl into the country. But when policymakers consider measures to combat the drug crisis, it's crucial they also consider the demand side of the problem, and the role businesses can play.

In addition to government efforts, employers can and should be called on to do their part to help reduce the problems caused by the opioid and fentanyl epidemic.

The opioid epidemic has imposed a substantial financial burden on businesses through lost productivity, increased healthcare costs, and greater costs for workers' compensation claims. Additionally, employers are adversely affected by the drug crisis through local opioid use, as an increase in local drug abuse can result in a reduction in the number of qualified job candidates.

All employers should be interested in implementing any

program that addresses the well-being of workers, but in this era of increased substance abuse and drug overdoses, helping to prevent addiction ought to be one of the most important workplace goals at every organization.

Most Opioid Abusers Employed

According to the U.S. Substance Abuse Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA), 48.7 million Americans suffer from a substance abuse disorder. That's more than 17% of the U.S. population. Additionally, SAMHSA reports that more than 60% of adults who report past-year opioid misuse are currently employed. This means the largest concentration of demand for addictive opioid drugs is in the American workplace. We must attack the demand-side of the U.S. opioid crisis at this enormous concentration of demand.

The workplace is a significant part of employees' daily lives and employers are uniquely positioned to play a pivotal role in preventing and treating opioid use disorder, both within and beyond their workplaces. Companies have a great deal of influence in the lives of employees, and employers can wield considerable influence across all stages of the

continuum: drug prevention, intervention, treatment, and recovery. Companies and corporations can and should save lives by implementing and maintaining comprehensive drug free workplace programs.

Supervisor's Role

Supervisors within a drug free workplace program should have a desire to help their employees remain drug free. Managers who want to promote employee well-being and maintain a safe workplace environment must accept the responsibility of addressing employee substance abuse problems.

Awareness, training, and drug education are essential in attacking the demand-side of the drug problem, and educating employees on the problems surrounding addiction and substance abuse can go a long way in reducing the harm. As a part of implementing and maintaining a drug free workplace program, supervisors can distribute information about drug and alcohol risks, host workshops on healthy alternatives, and provide wellness options.

Supervisors should also make every effort to become well-trained on how to identify signs of substance abuse such as: unexplained absences, increased accidents, reduced productivity, and erratic or impulsive behavior.

Workplace-based Help

Employees struggling with a substance use disorder need support and companies should have processes in place that provide treatment and counseling for those in need. Supervisors should be fully aware of and promote these treatment programs.

Employee Wellness

Supervisors must focus on creating supportive work environments that address addiction and recovery issues with empathy. This includes helping by offering a good work-life balance, managing fair and equitable leave policies, and promoting stress management techniques and options that employees can implement at work and home.

When supervisors focus on preventing substance abuse at work and creating a culture that supports recovery, companies and organizations will benefit from a healthier, more productive workforce. Not only will this help employees live better lives, but employers will see a reduced turnover rate, fewer injuries and accidents, and a reduction in healthcare expenses overall. Through supportive policies and approaches, and with the participation of supervisors, companies can work toward fulfilling their corporate social responsibility and cultivating a healthy, strong workforce.



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