

## **Drug Testing in the Occupational Setting**

**More than 30 million drug tests are performed annually, including over 10 million that are federally regulated under the authority of the DOT, the Department of Defense, or other federal agency. Additionally, there are 20 million drug tests performed in the private sector. In 1990 larger employers were much more likely to have written policies (74%) and sponsor employee assistance programs (EAPs-79%), than to conduct drug testing (46%). A 1995 survey of 1200 companies showed that while 75% were still offering EAPs, 77.7% were now conducting drug tests, with 47% offering drug related education and 45% providing supervisor training on drug abuse. Drug testing numbers are highest among protective services, transportation, material moving, and precision production**

Illicit use crosses all industries, being highest in construction, wholesale, and retail trades (15.4%, 13.6%, and 12.2%, respectively) of full time employees aged 18-34. Because of mandated DOT drug testing, the transportation industry falls in the middle with prevalence of illicit drug use having dropped substantially over the last decade.

In a study of US Postal Service applicants, those who screened positive for drugs had 66% higher absenteeism, 77% greater likelihood of being fired, 143% more EAP referral, and 26% higher medical claims over a 3.3 year period than those who screened negative.

In a study of Georgia Power employees, hours of absenteeism for those testing positive for drugs was 165 compared to 91 for those treated for drug abuse, 73 hours for those

treated for alcohol and 41 for the average worker. Annual general medical benefits costs were \$1,314 for those testing positive for drugs, \$1,347 for those treated for drugs, and \$842 for those treated for alcohol.

## **Establishing a Drug**

### **Testing Program**

#### **Federally Regulated vs. Non-federally Regulated Drug Testing Models**

Federally regulated drug testing is governed by the DHHS, DOT, DOD, DOE, and other agencies. Federal testing has detailed procedures for alcohol testing and using specimen collection, completion of custody and control forms, analysis of urine specimens by DHHS certified labs for amphetamines, cocaine, opiates, marijuana, and PCP.

Reporting of all results to an MRO for review and interpretation, reporting of results to the employer, referral to substance abuse professionals, confidentiality, as well as record keeping and statistical reporting are all mandatory. DOT, considered to be the gold standard, has been legally tested and holds up in court. Use of federal procedures is recommended even if the company is not covered by federal mandates.

#### **Components of a Comprehensive Drug Free Workplace Program**

**T**he program should include a formal written policy that ensures fairness for all employees and minimizes litigation, avoiding conflicts with federal, state and antidiscrimination regulations. Additionally, the program should include an employee assistance program (EAP), supervisor training, employee education, and methods for detecting illicit drug users. Also important are the inclusion of drug panel guidelines such as the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS),

which published Mandatory Guidelines for Federal Workplace Drug Testing Programs in April 1988, and the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) guidelines.

### **Defining the Drug Problem**

In 1999, 14.8 million Americans ages 12 and over used one or more illicit drugs during the previous month, a decrease of 41% from 1979.

Of the 26 million people who in 1997 reported using marijuana, 6.4 million used it once a week or more frequently, 10.2 million used it monthly, and 9.3 million used it occasionally.

In 1999, 1.5 million people reported having used cocaine in the last month, 11.2 million used marijuana in the last month, and 13.3 million were heavy drinkers (5 or more drinks on 5 or more occasions in the past month).

Whereas the prevalence of illicit drug use has dropped over a decade, prevalence of frequent cocaine use has not changed, and recidivism after rehabilitation for illicit drug abuse is high compared to those treated for alcoholism.

Illicit drug use is particularly prevalent among employees aged 18-25 and higher among males than females and those with less formal education and lower income.

### **Full Time Part time Unemployed**

Source: SAMHSA 2003 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse, 2004

Did you know that 74.3% of current illicit drug users over 18 years of age are employed? This statistic becomes even

more daunting when you consider that a drug user in the workplace will cost between \$11-13 k (per year) in healthcare costs, lost productivity, unemployment, injury and workers compensation. Studies have shown that over a 3 year period applicants who screen positive for drugs have:

**-66% higher absenteeism**

**-77% greater chance of being fired**

**-143% more EAP referrals**

**-26% higher medical claims**

### **Value of Drug Testing in the Workplace**

#### **Types of Worksite Testing**

Pre-employment/Pre-placement: most prevalent form of drug testing. This is not considered a medical test under ADA, therefore testing can occur at any time during the interview process, including prior to an employment offer.

Current drug users are not protected under ADA;

ADA protects former illicit drug users. Other types of

worksite testing include:

- Post accident/Post incident

- Reasonable Cause/Reasonable Suspicion

- Random

- Return to Duty and Follow-up

Source: Institute for Corporate Productivity, 2005