

Workers impaired by drugs or alcohol can cause serious damage to your business in the form of increased absenteeism, lower productivity, higher health care costs, higher workers' compensation claims, and more on-the-job injuries and accidents. In order to maintain a safe and productive work environment, employers should take action to stop substance abuse. A cornerstone of such an initiative is often a substance abuse testing program.

Creating a Testing Program

If your organization decides to implement a testing program, consider these recommendations from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) when creating and executing your efforts:

- Determine the ultimate goal of your program and how it can benefit your organization and your employees.
- Determine what drugs to test for. Commonly used drugs include alcohol, cocaine, marijuana, prescription drugs, PCP, heroin and ecstasy.
- Determine what type of testing you will use.
- Breath, saliva, urine and blood testing are most commonly used to test for drugs and alcohol.
 - **NOTE: For federal agency employees, HHS only permits urine specimen testing for drugs, and saliva and breath specimen testing for alcohol.**
- Determine what testing procedures will be put into place.
 - Designate where employees need to go to provide specimens for testing. The site should be a suitable medical facility or testing unit.
 - The employee should be allowed to initiate the seal and properly label the specimen container.
 - If your facility is using a laboratory for testing, it must be certified by HHS' Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. There are approximately 30 certified laboratories in the United States.
 - Laboratories must be familiar with the minimum level at which substances can be detected in the body and the quantity of drugs or alcohol in the system when screening urine specimens. This will enable them to determine whether a sample is positive or negative.
- Determine when to test for drugs and alcohol in the workplace. Testing may be done during the pre-employment process, after an accident or injury, after reasonable cause or suspicion, randomly and/or as part of a follow-up to rehabilitation. Everyone in the company should be tested equally, all the way up to top executives. This includes any pre-employment or periodic random testing.
- Determine how test results will be evaluated and discussed with the employee.

- After a positive test result, your medical review officer (MRO) or HR staff member should discuss the results with the employee. This is the time to determine why a false positive may be an issue. The MRO or HR member should:
 - Request a description of the test results from the testing laboratory
 - Review and interpret positive test results
 - Conduct a thorough interview with the tested employee
 - Review the employee's medical history
 - Allow the employee to discuss the test results
 - If necessary, order a re-analysis of the sample
 - Reject test results that do not comply with the organization's policies
 - Determine if drug test results are consistent with legal drug use
 - Determine whether drug test results are scientifically insufficient
 - Pass test results on to management to determine the next course of action

Once you have decided how you will create and implement your program, be sure to draft a detailed policy outlining your drug testing program, along with specific procedures, rules and protocols. Give all employees access to this policy so that company expectations and procedures are clear.

Next Steps After a Positive Test Result

If an employee tests positive, it is your decision how you will handle it. You may choose to terminate the employee on the spot, give the employee a warning or suspension, or offer the employee a chance to get help.

Though simply having a testing program can be a deterrent, research suggests that a more comprehensive approach can be beneficial. For instance, if you have an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), promote that program for employees as a resource to help with addiction. If an employee tests positive, consider referring him or her to the EAP or allowing a leave of absence to seek treatment. You may want to consider offering treatment as a one-time option but terminating repeat offenders.

Regardless of your approach for dealing with a positive test result, make sure your policy expressly details the consequences and procedures following a positive test result. You should be clear and consistent with how you handle this situation in order to inform employees of your expectations and avoid potential lawsuits.

For more assistance in creating a drug and alcohol testing policy at your organization, consult legal counsel or visit www.samhsa.gov.