



# The importance of workplace drug testing

Companies need a detailed drug testing policy that is well communicated. Drug testing as part of a Drug Free Workplace Program has been successful in lowering the rates of positive tests. Many companies are starting to include prescription medications in their testing panel, including certain prescription opioids. Some employers require different policies to address requirements for safety sensitive positions, union guidelines, or other entities like the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) guidelines for regulated motor carriers, airline pilots, train operators and others.

## When drug testing should occur

- Drug testing should be done pre-employment. This will avoid the hiring of individuals who are actively abusing drugs.
- Drug testing should also be done post-incident. People using drugs are at increased risk of errors and injury. This also may help protect the employer if there is any litigation following the incident.
- Testing should be done for reasonable suspicion. In your company policy, define the factors that may give rise to a reasonable suspicion, including objective factors, such as an employee's appearance, speech and behavior, as well as any other information specific to your workplace.
- Drug testing should also be done randomly for people who work in safety-sensitive positions.

Contract with a reputable laboratory that is certified to provide these services. A Medical Review Officer should review all positive results, as interpretation can be complicated. A Medical Review Officer (MRO) is a licensed physician responsible for receiving and reviewing laboratory results generated by an employer's drug testing program and evaluating medical explanations for certain drug test results.

## Types of tests

**Urine Drug Testing (UDT)** Urine is most commonly tested substance for drugs. It is easily obtained and there is a broad range of testing that can be done. There is a lot of information on the Internet, however, on how to cover-up illicit drugs in urine tests. There are very specific guidelines when observed collection is indicated.

**Oral Fluids** Collecting oral fluids makes it much harder to compromise testing. At this time, oral fluid testing cannot test for as many drugs as urine drug tests but this technology is improving rapidly.

**Hair Testing** Hair testing is more expensive than urine and oral fluid testing. It does have the advantage of detecting any drug use over the previous 90 days. Unfortunately, it does not do well detecting benzodiazepines (sedatives). An alternative method must also be used to look for benzodiazepine use.

## What substances should companies test for now?

It is very important that employers remain current on what drugs they are testing for. Many companies use a standard 5-panel test that will miss most drugs of abuse. It is important to know the drugs that are commonly abused in your area. It may be helpful to call one of your local substance abuse treatment centers for this information.

All companies should make sure that they are testing for at least the following 7 compounds: **benzodiazepines, opiates, oxycodone, methadone, cocaine, amphetamines and THC, the active ingredient in marijuana.** It is important to realize that oxycodone and methadone will not show up on the opiates screen. If Dilaudid or fentanyl are commonly abused in your area, you will need additional tests for these.

Before making changes to your company's workplace drug testing program, it is advisable for an attorney experienced in drug-free workplace issues to review the drug testing policy and procedures. A legal review will ensure that both the testing process and employer actions are in compliance with local, state and federal laws and regulations.

It is very important that employers remain current on what drugs they are testing for. It may be helpful to contact a local substance abuse treatment center for this information.

**National Safety Council**  
1121 SPRING LAKE DRIVE  
ITASCA, IL 60143-3201  
(800) 621-7619  
[nsc.org](http://nsc.org)