Alcohol, Drugs & Impairment Division

Alcohol, Drugs and Impairment Division – NATIONAL SAFETY COUNCIL

Position Statement

Confirmation of Presumptively Positive Drug Test Results in Transportation, Workplace and other Safety-Related Cases

Position

The Alcohol, Drugs and Impairment Division of the National Safety Council recommends that all presumptively positive drug test results of biological specimens (e.g., blood, oral fluid, urine, hair) obtained for transportation, workplace, death, and serious injury investigations be confirmed with additional laboratory testing prior to reporting. Drug testing results in these types of investigations can have serious consequences, including criminal prosecution or loss of employment. It is essential that the risks associated with presumptively positive test results be mitigated by routinely conducting appropriate confirmatory testing.

Background

Initial drug tests (drug screens) performed to detect the potential presence of a drug(s) or drug class, range from colorimetric and immunoassay methods to chromatography and mass spectrometry (MS) based techniques. These tests are preliminary and presumptive.

A confirmatory test is necessary to positively identify the specific drug(s) present. Drug confirmation tests generally use gas or liquid chromatography (GC or LC) with MS (e.g., GC-MS, LC-MS/MS). Confirmatory tests identify the presence of the drug(s) (qualitative) and may also determine the amount of the drug(s) (quantitative).

It is acknowledged that certain circumstances (e.g. insufficient sample volume) may impact a laboratory's ability to follow this recommendation.

The United States Department of Health and Human Services - Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (DHHS-SAMHSA) requires that laboratories for federal agency workplace drug testing "*use a confirmatory drug test method that specifically identifies and quantifies the drug or drug metabolite*".[DHS 3.2.2]

The American National Standards Institute/Academy Standards Board (ANSI/ASB) Standard 113 provides the requirements for the identification of a drug during forensic toxicology testing. The standard further acknowledges that "*Although one hyphenated instrumental technique (e.g., LC-MS/MS) may be sufficient to achieve identification, this alone does not ensure the reliability, reproducibility, quality, and integrity of results. As a matter of good laboratory practice, two aliquots of the same or different matrices from the same subject should be independently analyzed*."[ANSI 4.1.5] The data obtained from all testing is necessary to positively identify the drug(s) present.

References

Department of Health and Human Services - Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, Division of Workplace Programs (2025). Medical Review Officer Guidance Manual for Federal Workplace Drug Testing Programs, https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/mro-guidance-manual-2025.pdf

ANSI/ASB Standard 113 Standard for Identification Criteria in Forensic Toxicology, First Edition, 2023 https://www.aafs.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/113_Std_e1_0.pdf

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