

Beyond The Cab

The only safety management newsletter dedicated exclusively to addressing injury prevention and workers' compensation cost control for trucking companies.



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Drug / Alcohol Testing

The subject of substance abuse testing is not something new to the transportation industry. The requirement to have such a program has been in existence for several years. However, this requirement only applies to those employees who maintain a commercial drivers license. What about the other employees? Most trucking companies are staffed with mechanics and virtually all trucking companies are staffed with dispatchers. Are they included in the company substance abuse prevention program? If not, why not? Consider the potential impact of a dispatcher, mechanic or other non-driving employee under the influence of drugs or alcohol could have upon the safety of others.



Consider these facts. No business, regardless of size or location, is immune to the countless problems that alcohol and drug abuse can cause. Most individuals who abuse alcohol and other drugs are employed, and when they arrive for work, they don't leave their problems outside the door.

Everyone involved in a business—both employers and employees—suffers when there is workplace alcohol and drug abuse. Some costs are obvious, such as increased absences, accidents and errors. Others, such as low morale and high illness rates, are less so, but the effects are equally harmful.

Data from the Department of Labor reveals that of callers to the National Cocaine Helpline, 75% admit to having used drugs on the job, 64% report that drugs have adversely affected

their job performance, 44% say they have sold drugs to fellow employees and 18% say they have stolen from coworkers to support their drug habit.

When it comes to workplace substance abuse, small businesses have big disadvantages. They are less likely to have programs in place to combat the problem, yet they are more likely to be the "employer-of-choice" for illicit drug users. Individuals who can't adhere to a drug-free workplace policy often seek employment at companies that don't have one, and the cost of just one error caused by an impaired employee can devastate a small company.

Despite recent news reports about the increased use of drugs, particularly among young people, workplace substance abuse is a problem that can be controlled. When the issue is addressed by establishing comprehensive programs that include a policy, education and training, testing, and access to treatment through EAPs or other resources, it is a "win-win" situation for both employers and employees.

There are several advantages of conducting substance abuse screening for all employees. Initially, post job offer screening deters abusers from applying for the job. Random screening continues to deter abuse, but it also identifies those who need help, will accept it, or instead accept termination of their employment. Post accident screening serves the same purpose, but it also provides critical information that may enable your workers' compensation insurance provider to deny the claim. The motive is not to punish – it is to protect employees, and their families, co-workers, employers and the business from the devastating effects of drug abuse.

A special note for trucking companies...

- Include all employees in the program, not just those that possess a CDL.
- Extend the screening program to include post accident testing beyond the DOT requirements for testing. This will encompass all those injuries incurred by drivers while they were not driving. Incidentally, this is the larger portion of injuries sustained by drivers.

Additional information can be obtained by visiting the Midwestern Insurance Alliance web page (Certified Loss Control Program and then Drug Free Workplace Info link).

My company takes my safety serious enough to go beyond the DOT standards.



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