

Reasonable Suspicion: Drug and Alcohol Testing

Reasonable Suspicion Drug and Alcohol Testing

by Stacey Field, PHR

Have you ever suspected an employee was under the influence of drugs or alcohol? Did you turn your head, questioning your own judgment? Or perhaps you were hesitant to handle the matter on your own? Recognizing the signs of drug/alcohol abuse will make an uncomfortable situation smoother while protecting your employees' health and safety, as well as your company's bottom line.

Per the American Council for Drug Education, compared to their non-abusing coworkers, drug and alcohol abusers are ten times more likely to miss work, 3.6 times more likely to be involved in on-the-job accidents (and 5 times more likely to injure themselves or another in the process), five times more likely to file a worker's compensation claim, 33% less productive and responsible for health care costs that are three times as high. These staggering statistics make business owners everywhere consider the drug and alcohol policies in place and whether reasonable suspicion drug testing is right for their workplace.

Reasonable suspicion drug testing occurs when an employer has reason to believe that an employee is under the influence of drugs or alcohol while conducting work. In order to act on reasonable suspicion, employers should first ensure the company has a drug/alcohol policy that addresses reasonable suspicion testing. In the absence of written policy, past practice sets precedent.

What should employers look for? According to The American Council for Drug Education, some signs of substance abuse include:

- Frequent, prolonged and often unexplained absences
- Involvement in accidents both on and off the job
- Erratic work patterns
- Reduced productivity
- Indifference to personal hygiene
- Overreaction to real or imagined criticism
- Physical signs such as exhaustion, hyperactivity, dilated pupils, slurred speech or unsteady walk

If your suspicion is true and the employee tests positive for drugs or alcohol, there are two approaches to handling the issue. Some employers choose to terminate the employee immediately. Another option is to place the employee on a Stipulation Agreement. Typically administered by the human resource department or employee assistance program (EAP), this program outlines requirements for the employee's ongoing drug/alcohol testing, counseling and/or rehabilitation.

Drug and alcohol abusers can be very disruptive and costly to the workplace. Having direct policies and procedures in place to deal with these issues as they arise will ensure these costs do not get out of hand.

For more information, contact Tandem HR at 630.928.0510 or visit www.tandemhr.com. The staff at Tandem HR contributed to this article. It is intended as information only and is not a substitute for legal

advice. Tandem HR is a professional employer organization specializing in strategic HR partnership with small and mid-sized businesses.

Copyright © 2010 Tandem HR. All rights reserved.