



NAC Executive Insights

Safety Culture Series

Drug and Alcohol Testing

Key Points

- Drug and alcohol testing is an essential part of “Zero-Injury Safety Culture.”
- Drug and alcohol testing has not been effectively implemented throughout the construction industry.
- Drug and alcohol testing demonstrates a safety culture and genuine care for employees, eliminates unacceptable risk, and helps ensure the safety of all employees.
- Drug and alcohol testing is good business, results in worker’s compensation and insurance savings, and increased profits.

Introduction

This Executive Insight discusses the importance of drug and alcohol testing in helping to create and maintain a Zero-Injury Safety Culture. The drug and alcohol testing policies, processes, and program must be comprehensive, compliant with federal and state laws and regulations, and superbly managed. All potential applicants and current employees must understand and believe the company does everything it can to ensure a drug and alcohol abuse zero tolerance culture and their individual commitment to comply is expected and paramount.

Although drug and alcohol testing has had widespread acceptance throughout the construction industry for several decades, it has not been effectively implemented. The U.S. Department of Labor estimates workplace drug use costs U.S. employers \$75 – \$100 billion in lost revenue annually due to lost time, accidents, healthcare, and worker’s compensation costs. Also, per the U.S. Department of Labor, the construction industry is one of the top industries for drug and alcohol abuse. Construction workers are the second-highest users of illegal drugs (15 percent), double the U.S. national average.

Drug and alcohol testing helps to establish and maintain a safe work environment and to ensure the safety of all employees. Drug and alcohol testing is about deterrence and zero tolerance. In an effective program, all employees believe if they abuse drugs and alcohol, they will be caught and will be held accountable. In addition to helping ensure the safety of all employees, drug and alcohol testing is:

- A demonstration of safety culture and genuine care for all employees and the elimination of unacceptable risk.
- A competitive advantage.
- Critical to brand and reputation and instilling trust with employees and their families, clients, subcontractors, and suppliers.

- Good business. It results in worker's compensation and insurance savings and increased profits.

Assessing/Improving a Company's Drug and Alcohol Testing Program

Companies should continuously assess, evaluate, and improve their drug and alcohol testing policies, processes, and program and ensure that they are in full compliance with federal and state laws and regulations, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and if they have represented employees, their implementation protocols are in accord with the union agreements. A key element of a program's effectiveness is the company's drug and alcohol education, training, and communications. Continuous employee education and training, reinforced through bulletins, meetings, and the chain of command, is encouraged. Employee feedback is proactively encouraged to ensure deep understanding and ownership of the program and to solicit their recommended changes and improvements.

The company must have a robust supervisory training program that ensures deep knowledge and understanding of the company's drug and alcohol policies, processes, and program; the applicable federal and state laws and regulations; union agreements (if they have represented employees); and the circumstances that could merit a drug and alcohol test. Robust supervisory training also helps secure the employees' trust that the program is executed in compliance with the company's policies and processes, the federal and state laws and regulations and union protocols, and it is fair, firm, and consistent across all departments, offices, and job sites.

Pre-Employment Testing

A company's brand and its reputation for zero tolerance of drug and alcohol abuse set the stage for potential new employees. One hundred percent pre-hire drug testing is required. Per the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), however, it should be noted that employers are prohibited from performing pre-employment testing for alcohol use.

Potential applicants who abuse drugs and alcohol will avoid companies with robust drug and alcohol testing programs. As part of the offer of employment, potential employees are provided the documents and by signing they understand the company's comprehensive zero tolerance policies, processes, and program and their hiring is dependent on the results of their initial drug screening testing. If the results are positive for the presence of drugs, the offer will be withdrawn. The employee's signature also confirms that continued employment depends on strict compliance with the company's zero tolerance for drug and alcohol abuse.

Employee Drug and Alcohol Testing

Drug and alcohol testing is about deterrence and zero tolerance. Through the company's Zero-Injury Safety Culture and its leadership, employees understand the drug and alcohol testing program reduces unacceptable risk and helps to maintain a safe work environment for them and those that they serve. To achieve a drug-free company and workplace, employees know their full commitment and individual

compliance and that of their fellow employees are paramount. Their unified mindset and commitment are critical.

Effective construction companies conduct contraband searches and have implemented the following different types of testing as part of their proactive drug and alcohol testing programs.

- **Company-wide.** It is unannounced and everyone, including senior management, is tested. No one is exempt. All employees are tested within a few hours.
- **Random.** No advance notice. Those tested are selected from an employee pool based on a scientifically random basis to assure an equal chance for selection among all employees. Safety sensitive positions (e.g., equipment operators and crane operators) are always tested.
- **Periodic.** Usually occurs annually and especially for positions that require physical examinations.
- **Reasonable suspicion.** Testing is directed when a supervisor has observed and documented the signs and symptoms of drug use. Suspicions must be corroborated by management.
- **Post-incident.** Testing occurs whenever a significant incident happens. Limitations on testing, included incidents, and testing processes are specifically cited in the company's policies. Significant incidents normally include:
 - Fatalities.
 - Injuries that require off-site medical care.
 - Property damage that exceeds a specified dollar amount.
 - Police citation.

Conclusion

Effective drug and alcohol testing is paramount to creating and maintaining a "Zero-Injury Safety Culture." It demonstrates the genuine care for all employees and the reduction of unacceptable risk. It helps to establish and maintain a safe work environment and to ensure the safety of all employees. It is a competitive advantage and critical to brand and reputation and instilling trust with employees and their families, clients, subcontractors, and suppliers.

Drug and alcohol testing is about deterrence and zero tolerance. In an effective program, all employees believe if they abuse drugs and alcohol, they will be caught and will be held accountable. Hiring and continued employment depend on strict compliance with the company's zero tolerance for drug and alcohol abuse.

For Further Reading – Safety Culture Series (Executive Insights)

- [Introduction to the Safety Culture Series](#)
- Safety Culture – [Human Performance Principles](#)
- Safety Culture – [Worker Participation in the Safety Management System \(SMS\)](#)
- Safety Culture – [Demonstrating a Culture of Care and Support: The Leaders’ Role](#)

About the Author

Mike Loose was elected to the National Academy of Construction in 2013. Mike retired from the U.S. Navy as a vice admiral and later from the Parsons Corporation as its corporate operations officer. He is well known for his distinguished military service and as a senior leader in the construction industry. Mike has contributed significantly throughout his career in creating exceptional safety cultures and leading world class safety performance.

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