

How Do Employers Benefit from a Drug Free Workplace?

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Hiring and managing employees maybe one of the most difficult and sometimes neglected tasks business owners face today. There is much liability associated with both. Having a well thought-out and legal drug testing program is a must, especially if you hire “safety sensitive” employees. Safety-sensitive function means all time from the time a (commercial truck and bus) driver begins to work or is required to be in readiness to work until the time he/she is relieved from work and all responsibility for performing work.

The economic challenges we face today has us all looking for ways within our respective company’s to cut costs and save money. One area of potential savings that is often overlooked is drug and alcohol testing. Many believe that a drug and alcohol testing program is one of those “Catch 22” things – we “can’t afford it right now,” when in reality, once the many savings benefits are understood, a program really becomes something a company “can’t afford **not** to do!”

The American Alliance Drug Testing (AADT) has been involved within the drug and alcohol testing industry since 1995 and we’ve experienced a lifetime of knowledge, many of us have likely growing up and lived around family members and friends with past generations involved within the heavy equipment, construction, and the commercial transportation industry. We have all seen our share of substance abuse and alcohol misuse among people at all levels. In turn, we have also heard the many excuses, blame, enabling behavior and regrets, as to why an employer did not have a drug free workplace policy and program in place or failed to consistently enforce the one they had.

Whether drug and alcohol testing is a mandated requirement for your business through various federal, state, county, city agencies or labor or trade contracts, or if you are concerned with the overall safety factors and well being of your employees, it’s a subject that we all should take seriously.

Drugs, whether illegal or prescription, are tightly controlled because of their effects on human behavior and health. It is a long proven fact that enacting a drug free workplace program within your company can ensure employees are aware of the dangers of substance abuse and alcohol misuse and can help to minimize on-the-job accidents, absenteeism, tardiness, and even employment turnover. Businesses that have an established drug free workplace program have experienced an increase in staff morale, motivation and productivity which in turn leads to increased customer satisfaction.

Every employer knows having employees is a very costly but necessary element of their business. There’s wages, employer taxes, benefits, insurance, and the time and effort invested into product knowledge and training unique to each person’s position. So when these operating costs are factored in along with the additional burden of accidents or incidences associated with legal expenses, insurance, unemployment or disability claims, thief, destruction or damage to the company’s assets (vehicles, machinery or equipment), the potential savings become very evident. Than there is the issue of the potential loss of your industrious efforts spent building your business and just one catastrophic accident claim could jeopardize your businesses future.

Additionally, many insurance products including workers’ compensation programs offer savings through incentive programs, some in the form of a discount on premiums or a percentage of their fees returned due to a reduction in filed claims.

Currently there are no federal laws prohibiting employers from pre-employment drug testing their employees. However, there are several states, cities and counties that restrict or question an employer’s ability to “randomly” drug test employees who are not in “safety-sensitive” positions. Some federal state and even city laws have certain restrictions on how the specimen (urine or hair follicle) may be collected from the donor. Therefore, it is extremely important that employers familiarize themselves with the various federal and state laws that may apply to their organization and consider seeking the advice of legal counsel or labor relations specialist prior to implementing a drug free workplace program.

Drug free workplace programs vary based on each organization’s specific needs. Whether it is a simplified version that defines the basic zero tolerance with immediate termination or a detailed version defining the company’s philosophies and rehabilitation expectations, regardless of your decision a written drug free workplace policy is the foundation of a drug free workplace program.

- 1.) Develop a Drug Free Policy** - Typically a drug free policy should provide written guidelines that prohibit employees from the possession, use, sale, or manufacture of illegal drugs and intoxicants while on company property, during work hours or while on company related functions. Define what is considered company property (i.e., desks, lockers, tool boxes, company vehicles, employee vehicles on company property, or job sights). A provision regarding fitness for duty should also be included stating that employees are expected to be in

suitable mental and physical condition and able to perform their assigned job duties satisfactorily at all times. The policy should emphatically communicate the company's position on illegal drugs, substance abuse and alcohol misuse and what employees can expect if the policy is violated. The policy must be carefully communicated with adequate notice to all employees. Deviation from the policy is sure bet for setting your program up for failure. For your convenience here on the AADT website we have two options to help you develop a custom Drug & Alcohol Testing Policy.

- 2.) Determine Who Will be Tested** - Evaluate when, how, and for whom drug and/or alcohol testing will be conducted (i.e., job applicants, all employees, employees in jobs involving safety or security, employees in a supervisory position, etc.). Another consideration is whether testing will be periodic and announced or random and unannounced. If an employee has been involved in an accident will post accident testing be required and if so under what circumstances. Also, will testing be a requirement for employees that have been on an extended leave of absence.
- 3.) Train Supervisors** - Training for managers and supervisors is critical in identifying and preventing substance abuse cases. Supervisory training should address the physical, behavioral, speech and performance indicators of probable alcohol misuse and the use of controlled substances, proper documentation of questionable behavior, and how to constructively confront the employee. Managers and supervisors must be familiar with the disciplinary consequences of violating the company's drug free policy and be consistent with the enforcement of those consequences.
- 4.) Educate Employees** - Education plays a key factor in the success of a drug free program. Making your employee's aware of the dangers of drug abuse and alcohol misuse in the workplace make for a safe and productive work environment. A drug and alcohol education program provides employees with the information they need to fully understand and cooperate with and benefits from their company's drug free workplace program and clearly communicates the consequences that may be imposed on employees for under the influence or possessing drugs and/or alcohol on the job.
Employers should relay the message that there is help available through drug and/or alcohol counseling, rehabilitation, and assistance programs for those in need. Sometimes employers even provide company wide training to supervisors and employees regarding the dangers of illegal drug use and alcohol misuse through the use of outside consultants or substance abuse professionals.
If it is determined that employees are using drugs and/or alcohol will the company allow for rehabilitation or will employees be subject to immediate termination. Also if suspicion is a factor, whether it is post accident or reasonable cause, suspension pending an investigation of the issue may be an appropriate recourse.
- 5.) Determine if Assistance Will be Provided?** - Experienced employees can be a valuable asset to a business and costly to replace. Employee assistance programs (EAPs) are a cost effective means of addressing poor work performance that may stem from employees' personal problems, including substance abuse. Through an EAP an employee is offered individual counseling with a private therapist or substance abuse professional (SAP) to get to the root of the problem and to suggest a rehabilitation program tailored to the employee's individual needs. Rehabilitation programs vary and can range from self-help group counseling to in or out patient addiction treatment centers. After care treatment with follow up testing, in some cases, is mandatory or optional in others, but can be monitored by the individual employer or a substance abuse counseling service.
Many times employers procrastinate implementing a drug free workplace program due to the misconception that it is too costly to develop a written policy or they have the overwhelming feeling of "how to even start". On the U.S. Department of Labor's Working Partners website (www.dol.gov/workingpartners) if one of the most extensive resources for assistance in implementing a drug free workplace program and information is available to the public at no cost. It is free to use. There's a tremendous amount of guidance here to help you build a tailored drug free workplace written policy and it all can be easily found by clicking on *Drug Free Workplace Advisor* link on the right hand side of the main screen.

So, in short, although establishing a drug free workplace program may seem to create an additional cost burden for your business; once you factor in all the many benefits identified here, in the long run, a drug free workplace program can prove to be a quantifiable and measurable cost savings and benefit for your business; and who doesn't need that today?

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