



Drugs testing information

On certain assignments contractors may be asked to have a drugs screening test before or during the duration of the project to meet the client's recruitment, random testing or incident-related needs. Drugs testing will not occur on each assignment. Certain military, government and security related projects may demand contractors comply with their drugs testing policy as would certain construction projects and assignments within wider industries such as rail.

We stress that the client is unable to perform drug and alcohol screening until a suitable policy is in place and furthermore a contractor has agreed to this policy in writing. The policy should be made clear during an induction / toolbox briefing. If a contractor refuses a drugs test once a contract has been signed it is deemed as breach of contract and is a dismissible offence. On certain assignments (generally defence or security related) there is a risk of dismissal just by association with co-workers who have been dismissed because of drugs use. This occurrence is quite rare.

If a contractor does not agree to the policy it is unlikely he/she will be eligible to work on that particular assignment, but this does not mean he/she will be unable to work on alternative assignments for the same client.

Screening must be performed according to ethical principles and be legally defensible. **A medical company is not able to provide screening services unless the employer has a policy for dealing with the results.**

Pre-employment drug and alcohol screening

Many companies use drug and alcohol screening as part of their recruitment process. Pre-employment screening can confirm whether prospective employees have used drugs shortly before their assessment. Specimen collection may be done on the premises of a medical company contracted to work for the client or, where facilities are available in the workplace.

Please note - unless the employer's policy addresses a specific legal obligation, a substantial safety risk or a public expectation of probity, then denial of employment on the basis of a positive screening may be challenged and found to be unfair.

Unannounced testing

Screening of contract staff may be used as a deterrent to drug or alcohol misuse. Workforce acceptance of such a programme is highly desirable before its introduction and is unlikely to be obtained unless the process is non-discriminatory. Again, the reservations above in respect of pre-employment testing apply.



"For cause" and "post-incident" related screening

This kind of screening is vital in safety-critical workplaces, such as the railway industry to identify whether drugs or alcohol were a causal factor in an accident or incident. This may also be justifiable where an employee appears to be under the influence of drugs or intoxicated whilst at work. Again this should only be performed under an employer's policy. Medical screening companies operate a 24-hour call-out service and someone can usually be at site within just two hours to conduct screenings.

The usual screening medium is urine. This has the advantage of long experience in use but can be inconvenient to collect. Other media, such as oral fluid, offer ease of sample collection particularly in the workplace. Hair testing is another possibility, partly aimed at looking for long term drugs use. Both oral and hair tests can be carried out simultaneously providing drug usage history from the immediate to 4 months.

Table of typical drugs tests

Substance	Urine	Hair	Blood
Alcohol	3-5 days (EtG test) or 10-12 hrs standard test	Lifetime of hair	12 hours
Amphetamines (except meth)	1 to 2 days	up to 90 days	12 hours
Methamphetamine	2 to 4 days	up to 90 days	24 hours
Barbiturates (except Phenobarbital)	2 to 3 days	up to 90 days	1 to 2 days
Phenobarbital	7 to 14 days	7 to 14 days	4 to 7 days
Benzodiazepines	3 days. Chronic use - 4 to 6 weeks	up to 90 days	6 to 48 hours
Cannabis	2 days. Prolonged Use: 3 to 4 weeks	Up to 120 days	12 days
Cocaine	2 to 4 days with exceptions for certain kidney disorders	up to 90 days	24 hours
Codeine	1 day	up to 30 hours	12 hours
Cotinine (a break-down product of nicotine)	2 to 4 days	up to 90 days	2 to 4 days
Morphine	2 days	up to 90 days	6 hours
Heroin	2 days	up to 90 days	6 hours
LSD	2 to 24 hours	Up to 3 days	0 to 3 hours
Methadone	3 days	Up to 3 days	24 hours
PCP	14 days; to 30 days in chronic users	up to 90 days	24 hours