

# Is Drug and Alcohol Testing Worth the Cost?

By JUSTIN REED

USIS

First, let's look at some facts.

A study of workplace substance abuse revealed that companies that implemented a comprehensive drug-free workplace program (including a formal policy, employee education and access to an EAP and drug testing) resulted in an approximately 50 percent lower positive drug test rate.

A study of companies engaged in random drug testing in combination with pre-employment testing reduced their mean workers' compensation claims per 100 employees per year by 63.7 percent over a four year period while the "control group" of employers (employers not conducting drug testing), experienced a 19 percent increase during that same period.

Results from a study of employment applicants for the U.S. Postal Service determined that applicants testing positive for drugs were 66 percent more likely to be absent and 77 percent more likely to be discharged within three years of hire than applicants testing negative for illicit drugs.

The most recent results of the Quest Drug Test Index© (Quest Diagnostics is one of the largest drug testing laboratories in the U.S.) state that the U.S. workforce's positive drug test results have declined nationwide, from a high of 13.6 percent in 1988, when many companies first started implementing drug testing programs to a low of 4.5 percent in 2003, when over 67 percent of employers conducted drug testing.

In a recent study, rates of current alcohol use were 61.8 percent for full-time employed adults aged 18 or older. Rates for "binge" drinkers were 29 percent and 8.4 percent for heavy drinkers (those considered alcohol dependent). Additionally, many more employees drink to a lesser degree.

**A common misconception** is that alcoholics are responsible for most alcohol-related workplace problems when, in fact, casual drinkers account for far more incidents of absenteeism, tardiness and poor quality of work than the alcohol dependent.

A "light to moderate" drinker (one who sometimes binges, i.e. typically has six or more drinks) is likely to report to work "hungover." Hangovers are costly to employers in both absenteeism and poor job performance; plus, hangover-related health problems include an elevated risk of heart attacks, reduced cognitive abilities, and irrational behavior. Studies reporting on the secondhand effects of alcohol use found one in five workers report being injured, having to cover for a co-worker or needing to work harder due to other employees' drinking. Nearly one-third of workers who consider their jobs to be dangerous report experiencing secondhand alcohol effects.

**Alcohol-related job performance problems** are caused not only by on-the-job drinking but also by heavy drinking outside of work. Although obvious, it is important to state that there is a positive relationship between being "hungover" and feeling sick at work, sleeping on the job and having problems with job tasks or co-workers. [A telling example: Among pilots whose performance was tested in flight simulators, researchers found evidence of impairment 14 hours after pilots reached blood alcohol concentrations of between 0.10-0.12 Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC), and significant impairment eight hours after reaching a BAC of 0.10.]

cts, the benefits of drug and alcohol testing far outweigh the cost. One only has to look at the dramatic reduction in positive drug test rates between 1988 when employers first started drug testing and 2003 when over 67 percent of employers test. The positive rate was 13.6 percent in 1988 and it was down to 4.5 percent in 2003.

As we discussed last month, there are five critical components of an effective drug-free workplace program: drug-free workplace policy, supervisor training, employee education, employee assistance and drug/alcohol testing. Each one of these components is, in fact, critical and complementary. Drug/alcohol testing provides the following benefits:

Pre-employment drug testing goes a long way toward weeding out those individuals who are chronic/habitual drug users.

Random drug and alcohol testing serves as a deterrent and is the major factor in helping to ensure existing employees remain drug free. The majority of employees value their job and, when confronted with a random drug/alcohol testing program, will choose to remain drug free and non-dependent on alcohol.

**Reasonable suspicion drug and alcohol testing** identifies individuals in the workplace that are clearly under-the-influence and provides a tool to remove them from the workforce. All identifications must be made by trained supervisors.

Post-accident drug and alcohol testing identifies individuals who were under-the-influence at the time of an accident or incident.

Lastly, a comprehensive Drug-Free Workplace Program helps ensure a more productive and safer work environment. It saves money for the employer through the increased productivity and reduces liability by demonstrating a commitment to a safer environment for both workers and the public.

163 Yard Par 3 eighth hole at the Refuge Golf Club in Oak Grove, Minnesota.



**HERFORT □ NORBY**  
Golf Course Architects

6452 City West Parkway, Eden Prairie, MN 55344

Phone: 952.942.0266 Fax: 952.942.0197

e-mail: [golfnorby@eschelon.com](mailto:golfnorby@eschelon.com)

web: [herfortnorbygolfarchitecture.com](http://herfortnorbygolfarchitecture.com)